

October, 1988 \$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK's

MYSTERY

MAGAZINE



THE DRESSING TABLE MURDER

A Scotland Yard
Investigation

by C. M. Chan

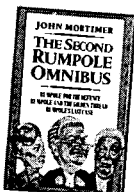
AND MORE
NEW STORIES
OF MYSTERY
AND
SUSPENSE



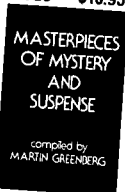
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MYSTERY GUILD

WE KEEP YOU IN SUSPENSE



4028 \$18.95



0885 Spec. ed.



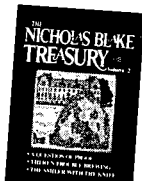
5736 \$16.95



4069 \$17.95



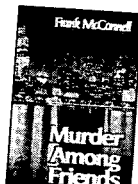
8763 \$12.95



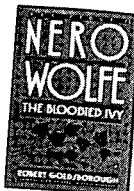
0893 Spec. ed.



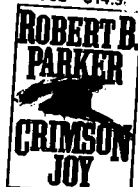
0711 \$14.95



★2816 \$12.95



4762 \$14.95



4176 \$16.95



4184 \$16.95



3186 \$18.95

TAKE ANY 6 BOOKS FOR 99¢ WITH MEMBERSHIP

Values up to \$114.70 in publishers' editions

Here's how your Mystery Guild® membership works: Start with any 6 books for 99 cents. You'll receive the books as soon as your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However once accepted, we'll bill you for 99¢ plus shipping and handling.

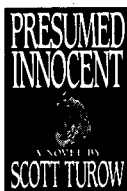
to 4 times a year you may also receive offers of Special Selections, always at discounts off publishers' edition prices. It's so convenient to order. If you want Selection



3715 \$17.95



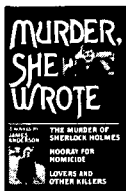
3178 \$15.95



★2352 \$18.95



3777 \$15.95



7385 Spec. ed.



0703 \$18.95



5058 \$15.95



0919 \$17.95



★0927 \$19.95



2378 Spec. ed.



9472 \$15.95



5769 \$16.95



4093 \$17.95



★4085 \$18.95



4077 \$18.95



★4127 \$17.95



2766 Spec. ed.



1115 \$15.95



8029 Spec. ed.



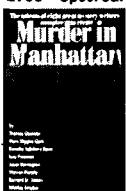
7369 \$16.95



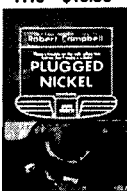
3152 Spec. ed.



1313 \$12.95



3004 \$15.95



4192 Spec. ed.

FREE TOTE
with membership



MYSTERY GUILD Garden City, NY 11535

Please accept my application for membership in The Mystery Guild and send me the 6 books indicated below, plus my FREE TOTE BAG. Bill me only 99¢ (plus shipping and handling). I understand that I need buy only 4 books at regular low Guild prices during my first year of membership to complete my commitment. After purchasing 4 books, I may cancel membership or continue without obligation. I agree to the Guild Plan described in this ad.

No-risk guarantee: If not satisfied, I may return the books within 10 days at Guild expense. My membership will be canceled and I will owe nothing. The free Tote is mine to keep in any case.

Write in code numbers of your 6 choices below.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Mr./Mrs. _____
Miss/Ms. _____

Address _____ Apt. No. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____
Members accepted in the U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada.

DS-025

35-MG09

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

FLORIDA PRIMITIVE by Janet O'Daniel	4
TWO PERSON LAKE by Mort Mason	26
TWIN CONFUSION by Steve Barancik	40
SITTER by Theodore H. Hoffman	48
THE DRESSING TABLE MURDER by C. M. Chan	58
BLOWUP by Dick Stodghill	96
ELEMENT OF DOUBT by Stephen Wasyluk	111
DON'T MAKE WAVES by George Ingersoll	126

MYSTERY CLASSIC

TIT, TAT, TUTT by Arthur Train	133
---------------------------------------	------------

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	3
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	57
UNSOLVED by Mary Ellen Slate	93
SOLUTION TO THE SEPTEMBER "UNSOLVED"	148
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon	149
MURDER BY DIRECTION by William Heller	152
THE STORY THAT WON	155

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 33, No. 10, October, 1988. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription \$25.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$29.50 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Call (614)383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1988 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 871 Janette Ave., Windsor, Ontario, N9C3Z1. **ISSN: 0002-5224.**

Cover by Michael Tedesco

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Some of you may remember that in August 1982—in that issue, anyway—we at AHMM made some changes in the format and contents of the magazine. We changed the typeface and general design, added a variety of illustrators, created new covers, and so on. And among those changes was the addition of our book and movie review columns, which have been regularly appearing ever since.

Now, after more than six years of thoughtful and insightful coverage of movies involving crime and mystery, Peter Shaw is turning in his press pass, very much to our regret. His reviews have appeared in some seventy-five issues, and have always been fresh,

substantial, and informed; he has often, for instance, gone out of his way to comment not only on the particular movie in question but on its relation to its literary source or how it fits into the subgenre of crime film it participates in. We thank him greatly for his excellent reportage and commentary and for (also important) his utter reliability. We have been honored to have him on the staff.

With this issue, we introduce our new movie reviewer, William Heller, who has worked on the entertainment beat for the *New York Post* and who has agreed to pick up where Peter has left off. We welcome him and know you will, too.

There are two other newcomers
(continued on page 92)

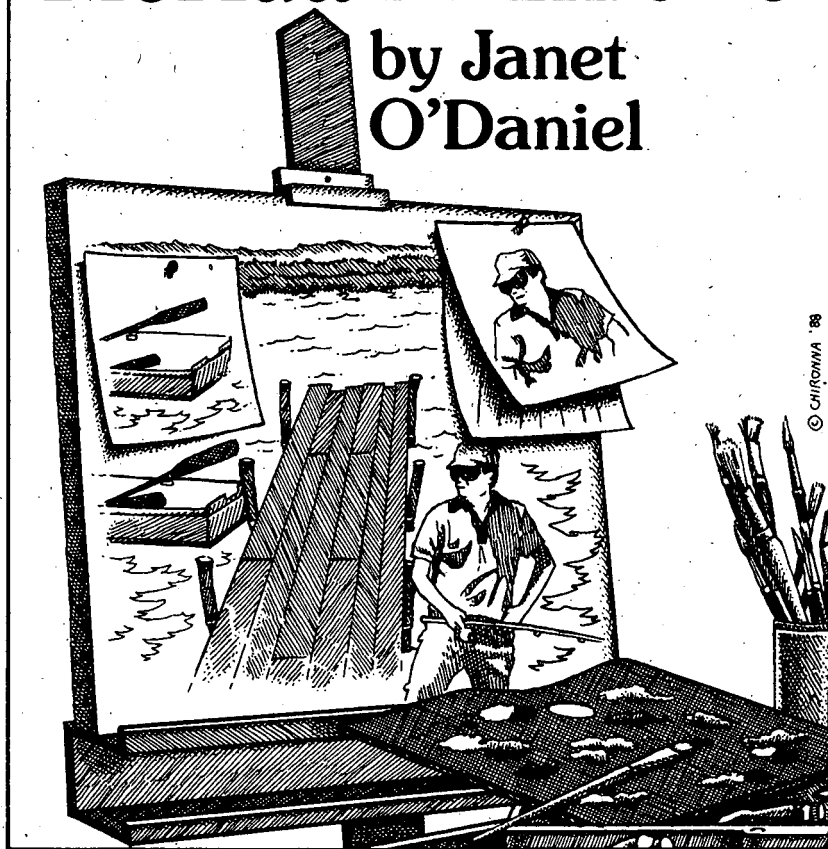
Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Brian Cox**, Managing Editor; **Holly Garrison**, Editorial Assistant; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Terri Czezko**, Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Art Editor; **Dennis Doyle**, Associate Designer; **Nancy Siwinski**, Art Assistant; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Robert J. Allen**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Christian Dorbant**, Subsidiary Rights Manager; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Sonya Castellucci**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **Brian McKeon**, Circulation Planning Director; **Laura Guth**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Lisa Feerick**, Advertising Services Manager; **William F. Battista**, Publisher
(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-795-3114).

Joel Davis, President; **Fred Edinger**, Senior Vice President, Finance; **Paula Collins**, Senior Vice President, Circulation; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing.

FICTION

Florida Primitive

by Janet
O'Daniel



I was working on a manuscript when the telephone call came. A college textbook in anthropology, *Some Observations on a Year in a Yucatan Village*. The author was a Dr. Laszlo Dietz, whom

I'd met once. I was already dreading our next meeting because as production editor I was going to have to tell him that the thing was going way over budget and there was no way we were going to be able to

Illustration by Ronald Chironna

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work in all the photographs. The first-fruits ceremony and the bring-rain altar rites, for instance, were definitely going to have to go. I had a feeling he'd be testy about it, and that's what I was thinking about when the phone rang.

"Miss Gail Fanning?" It was a man's voice, and I didn't recognize it.

"Yes."

Slight hesitation. "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

At the funeral I had a hard time concentrating on the service. A line of poetry kept going through my head in a distracting way. *Down to the puritan marrow of my bones there's something in this richness that I hate.* I tried to remember who'd written it. One of those women poets from the twenties, I thought. Edna St. Vincent Millay? Sara Teasdale? More like Elinor Wylie. I looked around the small chapel that adjoined the funeral home. Whitewashed interior, mock-gothic arch at one end. The young clergyman wore a clerical collar, but the bib-front was *mauve*, for God's sake. Outside the window, palm fronds dipped and moved in the breeze off the Gulf. It was all lush and tropical, color wherever you turned. Great red and pink blossoms swaying—almost erotically. Up

home, I thought, the first pale jonquils were just appearing, buds were still tight on trees, branches stark against April's sky.

I stole a glance at the man sitting next to me. I'd met him only briefly the day before, when he'd helped me arrange for the service. A round-faced man of forty or so in a wash-and-wear suit. Sarah's lawyer, who had telephoned me. It really had been kind of him to come, especially since hardly anyone else was there. A handful of people who I guessed had attended mostly for entertainment. So few, I thought, in tribute to the bright, strong talent and generous spirit of my cousin Sarah Cross. And, of course, we were a small family.

"Well, there's not a great deal, as you see," Mr. Hawley, the round-faced lawyer, said to me when we were back in his office. "The house and contents—that's about it. Anyway—" He spread his hands. "It's all yours."

"I feel awful that I didn't know about Sarah's being ill," I said. "I talked to her on the phone last month and she didn't give the slightest hint."

"Knowing Sarah, you must know that's the way she wanted it. She didn't want anybody worrying about her."

"I was here for a visit last year and she seemed all right."

We had spent that week watching the gulls and pelicans from her little dock, laughing at the games the dolphins were playing out in the bay, staying silent and very still when a great blue heron strolled along and looked us over. But there had been that one afternoon when we'd taken a long walk. Coming back she'd been out of breath and panting a little—paler than she should have been. "Damn. I should have paid more attention."

I felt suddenly teary and Mr. Hawley kindly made small talk.

"There was quite a difference in your ages, I guess."

"Yes. Almost twenty years. But we were close just the same. We were all the family there was, so age didn't seem to figure in it."

"Well, you'll want to think over what to do with the house. Possibly you may want to keep it. If so, it can be taken off the market."

I reached in my bag for Kleenex and blew my nose. "You mean it's *on* the market? Sarah was planning to sell it?"

"Yes, she'd listed it only a week or so before she died."

This surprised me. "But she loved that place so! Why on earth would she want to sell? Was it money trouble, do you think?"

Mr. Hawley's wash-and-wear shoulders went up in a shrug.

"Not as far as I know. She kept an account at the bank—a little she'd put aside—and I don't think she drew on it, not on the principal anyway. Maybe took some of the interest now and then to pay her taxes or something like that. And lately, you know, she'd been selling some of her work."

"I know—she told me that on the phone—we used to talk every now and then. I was so thrilled that she had, and now even more so. You know—that she'd experienced acceptance before it was all over." I glanced at the wall in back of Mr. Hawley's desk. "That's one of hers, isn't it?"

He nodded and turned to look at the painting along with me. "She gave it to me when I drew up the will for her. She said she hoped it would go up in value. I always liked her work anyway, and now I'm especially glad I have it."

The painting had a simple folk-art quality, yet there was no cloying sweetness about it. And what set it apart was the Florida ambience, so unlike the folk art I'd seen in the north, which was for the most part rooted in the New England or midwestern scene. Sarah's work was always strong and positive. In this one, a crowd of gulls, all facing into the wind, balanced and hovered in the air while one of their number stood on

the shore, sturdy and flat-footed, regarding a fish skeleton. The skeleton, disproportionately large in the foreground, had a bleached, sea-washed beauty. Indeed, there was a stark simplicity about the whole painting, even the thin distant figure of a man in the background, fishing, perhaps. It occurred to me that Sarah had had a puritan marrow, too.

"I do wish I'd known about her heart," I said. But what good would it have done? An anxious visit, nervous questions, exhortations to take it easy. All of which Sarah had anticipated and forestalled by going her own way and not telling anyone. "How did it happen?"

"Very suddenly. She was sketching out on her little dock. One of the neighbors found her. A man named Jake Wharton."

"Oh."

"About the house—" Mr. Hawley said gently.

"Oh—yes. Well, why don't we let it stand, keep it on the market, I mean. I couldn't afford to maintain two places, and obviously this was what Sarah was planning anyway." I hesitated. "I don't really understand why, but it doesn't matter now."

"Will you want to go there and sort out personal things?"

"I'd thought of that, yes."

"You can stay there if you

like. It would be all right. I'm sure Sarah would have wanted you to."

I shook my head. "I don't think I want to, with Sarah not there. I'm only staying another day anyway. I have to fly back to New York tomorrow night." My thoughts darted to the Yucatan and Laszlo Dietz. The production department would be screaming about their schedule and I hadn't finished working over the manuscript.

"What are you doing for transportation here?"

"I have a rental car."

"And you remember the way?"

"Oh sure."

"Please don't hesitate to call me if you need anything."

"Thanks. You've been terribly helpful already."

Heat was building up now in the early afternoon. I stopped at the motel to get out of the too-heavy suit I'd worn to the funeral. The Vista del Mar was a tall cube of a building facing the Gulf. A stretch of sandy beach separated it from the water, and determined vacationers were trudging up and down there, some of the hardier ones in swimsuits, dashing in and out of the chilly surf. "The snowbirds do that," Sarah had told me once. "They've paid for it and they're damned well going to get their money's worth. The

natives wait till everyone's gone home and the water warms up properly."

In jeans, T-shirt, and worn boat shoes, I felt a lot more comfortable, but I was still dreading my errand. I followed remembered streets away from the high-rise condos and motels, the restaurants that had been finished with instant weathering to make them look windswept and beach-worn, the fast-food places, the car agencies and coin laundries, on into the residential streets. Here trim concrete block houses were painted white or pink or pale yellow. Their well-tended lawns were accented by palms and citrus trees and flamed with flowers I didn't recognize. Sarah's house was on a street that curved and turned, staying close to the water. No longer the Gulf itself, but a small protected bay that was one of its arms. It was a low and starkly simple house that she and Roger Cross had built fifteen years before when they had first moved to this Gulf Coast city. After Roger's death she had kept going, working at a number of jobs—waitressing, clerking in a flower shop, shampooing poodles in a dog-grooming parlor. Holding her life together, and always with her painting to sustain her.

There was a car parked in front of the place, and when I

approached the front door I saw that it stood slightly ajar. I paused for a minute and then pushed it open. Two people were standing in front of the big windows of Sarah's sun-flooded studio-living room. The water of the bay was dazzling behind them. A man and a woman, both tall, handsome, well-dressed. I heard the woman saying in strong, clear tones, "When was the last time you saw a view like *that*?"

Then both of them seemed to become aware of me and turned toward the front door. The woman's eyebrows went up in a question. She was about forty, I thought, with a kind of bold good looks. Flaring reddish hair to her shoulders, bright green eyes, a wide mouth. The man was younger, still in his twenties, I judged. A handsome sunburned type with blond sunstreaked hair curled tightly all over his head.

"Yes?" The woman's voice carried an in-charge quality.

"Hello. I'm Gail Fanning," I said. "This is—my house." It wasn't, really. It would never be that—always Sarah's, of course—but the woman's officiousness annoyed me.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. How do you do, Miss Fanning." She stepped forward and held out her hand to shake mine firmly. "Bill Hawley told me about you. I'm Beatrice Worth—Bayview

Realty? I just can't tell you how sad we all feel about poor Mrs. Cross. This is Mr. Parkman, who's moving his family down from Cleveland next month—new job—and I was showing him the house. I assume you're leaving it on the market?"

"Yes, I am. And I'm only going to spend an hour or two here looking over personal things." I paused. "You can—go ahead."

"It's all right. We're finished. Mr. Parkman has some considering to do, although I told him a property like this won't be around long, didn't I, Mr. Parkman?"

"Yeah. Right," Mr. Parkman said, and I got the distinct impression that he had just exhausted his vocabulary. Muscles bulged under the business suit he was wearing and he looked uneasy. Which I thought might possibly have something to do with what I had seen through the partly-open door as I approached. The two of them standing before those windows, but glued together, embracing in a fairly steamy way just before they heard the sound of my footsteps and jumped apart. Possibly Bayview Realty encouraged the personal approach to selling, I thought.

By late afternoon I was feeling better—over some of the worst of the morning's mullicrabs. I'd spent most of the time

at Sarah's desk sorting out papers—accounts, receipted bills, correspondence. She had been surprisingly orderly and businesslike in her habits, I noted. What cheered me especially were the letters from a dealer in New York, the one whose gallery was selling her paintings. "Extraordinarily strong and captivating . . . everyone here is impressed . . . it would have done you good to hear all the praise. . . ." And one dated only two weeks before, "I assume you will be sending me the six paintings you spoke about. I think I may have a buyer for at least one of them already—Mr. Weaver, who loved your dolphins." I made a mental note to call the gallery when I got home and have a chat with him about Sarah.

I got up and looked around the room. Sarah had kept it sparsely furnished. A couch with two chairs beside it, a table in front of one of the big windows—we had eaten our meals there the year before. And then by the other window her easel with a high table alongside to hold her paints, tubes, rags, brushes, jars, palette. I saw pencil sketches for new paintings scattered over the table and more of them clipped to the easel where a canvas rested. It had some preliminary roughing-in on it. I could make out a dock and the figure of a man

beside it, rangy and thin. I didn't see any finished paintings, but of course she might have had a special place for them—I hadn't looked around much. Or maybe she'd sent them all to New York to the gallery.

Standing there in Sarah's house, I made a decision. I felt comfortable and very much at home once more. I was sure she would have wanted me to stay there, and now I wanted to myself. I would return to the motel for my things and then come back here to spend the night.

It seemed, at the moment, a perfectly sensible idea.

I checked out of the Vista del Mar and was back in Sarah's house within an hour, lugging Laszlo Dietz with me along with my suitcase. I put the rental car in the garage, and then, remembering that I'd missed lunch, I located canned soup, crackers, and cheese and ate at the table by the window. I even forced myself to work on the manuscript for a while. When I looked up again, the shadows were getting longer even though the sun was still brilliant on the water. Right then I could feel Sarah's presence in the room. It almost seemed that I might look across the table and see her sitting there in her paint-spattered denim work shirt. I could picture the thick shoulder-length

hair streaked with gray, the big dark eyes and strong square hands. I sighed and looked outside again.

A man was standing over at the edge of Sarah's little backyard. Houses were close together here, although they didn't seem crowded because the watery expanse of the bay gave everyone equal openness on that side. The man was tall and angular and I thought he might be the one Sarah had sketched in lightly in that last painting she'd been working on, the one still resting on her easel. Could he be the man who had found Sarah when she was stricken on her dock? I wanted to speak to him, so I hurried outside and crossed the lawn.

"Excuse me," I said. "Are you Jake Wharton?"

He was looking out at the water, but that didn't fool me, for when I'd first seen him he'd been staring at Sarah's house. Now he turned to look at me. There was a dark scowl on his face, but I thought it could be the strong sunlight that produced that. He had a gaunt, weathered look and a loose way of standing with his weight resting on one leg and his hands on his hips. He might have been any age between fifty and sixty, I thought.

"I am," he said, not smiling.

"I—thought you might be," I said. "I'm Gail Fan-

ning, Sarah Cross's cousin."

His head sketched a small nod. "Heard of you."

From Sarah, of course. That meant they were more than just nodding neighbors. They must have chatted together sometimes.

"Mr. Hawley, Sarah's lawyer, said you were the one who found her."

Again the short nod, and again he looked away from me, out over the water.

"I just wanted to know about it. You know—if it was quick and—well, I hope she didn't suffer."

"Dead is dead," he said in a harsh voice.

"Yes, I suppose." But I thought he might have been a little gentler about it. "I was surprised to hear that Sarah had been planning to sell her house."

"Why?"

"Well—she loved it so! She'd worked so hard to keep it all these years."

Square bony shoulders lifted in a small shrug.

"Changed her mind, I guess." Then he turned and walked away from me, ending the conversation. He moved to his own small dock, which was like Sarah's, knelt down and started working at something. I saw the flash of a knife in his hand, slender and deadly-looking, and a flock of gulls which had been wheeling offshore suddenly

veered around and came in toward him, shrieking. He tossed something away and as the birds squabbled over it, I realized he was cleaning fish. I turned around and went back inside. I had hoped, I suppose, that we might have been able to talk a little about Sarah, reminiscing and remembering her, and both of us would have felt better about it, but obviously I would have to cross Mr. Congeniality off my list. I was sorry he'd been the one to find Sarah instead of someone gentler and more sympathetic, even though he had probably done his best.

To keep busy, I cleaned the refrigerator, taking all the odd bits of leftovers out and depositing them on the dock for the clamoring birds. By now it was dusk, purple-shadowed and fragrant with the scent of the flowers Sarah had planted. I saw lilies and star fox, white stock—that was what smelled so sweet. I stood at the end of the property where the little square yard ended abruptly in sea wall and dock, and spun a few wild dreams about keeping the place—wishing I could but knowing I'd never be able to afford it, and then through the open window I heard the telephone ringing and hurried inside.

"Sarah? Dan Ingram."

"No—it's not—I'm sorry, it's not Sarah." Oh hell, I thought,

someone who doesn't know, and embarked on the painful explanation. When I'd finished there was silence for a few seconds at the other end.

"My God," he said then. "I had no idea. God, that's terrible. I talked to her last month—she told me about the work she was doing and about some stuff she was sending me."

I had already realized he must be the man from the gallery. "I know," I said. "I found your letter when I was going over Sarah's papers. I'm sure your interest in her work meant a great deal to her."

"Who did you say you were?"

"Gail Fanning. I'm Sarah's cousin. She didn't have any other family."

We talked a little longer about Sarah and her painting, and he was as sympathetic and friendly as Jake Wharton had been cold and stand-offish, so in the end I found some of the comfort I'd been seeking. Then he said, "If you're there settling things up, I guess maybe you'll be in charge of any paintings she may have left. Please keep us in mind. I know there were six she was planning to let us have. In fact, that's why I called tonight. To ask about them."

"You mean she didn't send them to you?"

"No. I thought maybe she was doing more work on them. There were others, too, several

that she said she wanted to look at again, see if she was satisfied with them before she sent them along."

"I haven't seen them anywhere around, but of course I haven't really looked carefully. I'll let you know what I find," I promised. After I'd hung up I glanced around the room again. It occurred to me that the year before when I'd visited here there had been canvases stacked everywhere, hanging on the walls, resting on the mantel. Of course she'd sent some to the gallery, I knew that. But the six she'd mentioned had never been received by them. And Dan Ingram had mentioned others. All I'd seen was the one rough sketch on the easel.

I set about to search the house systematically, turning on all the lights as the darkness descended quickly. Nothing in the main studio room. I went through the two small bedrooms. One was Sarah's, the other a kind of library and guest room where I'd slept before and where I'd deposited my suitcase today. Bookshelves and a small chest of drawers—I rooted through everything without finding a trace of anything except towels and linens. Even in Sarah's room there were only the poignant left-behind personal items of clothing that you'd expect to find. I went through all the closets, even the

kitchen cabinets. Then I moved to the attached garage where I'd parked the car, turned on the overhead light, and searched it thoroughly. A few piles of newspapers, trash containers, a bag of garden fertilizer, lawn mower, tools for gardening and tools for simple house repairs, a small dinghy hung from hooks on the ceiling, its oars leaning in one corner—Roger had used that for fishing, I remembered. It was like every garage up and down this street, I was certain. And not a sign of paintings anywhere. They had either gone astray on their way to New York—possible but not likely—or something else had happened to them. I decided not to put into words just yet what might have happened to them.

It's very seldom that I take a pill for anything. I'm the type who debates for a quarter of an hour before taking an aspirin when I have a headache. (It'll be all right; I don't really *need* it.) But today had been hard, starting with the funeral and not letting up. And also those things I'd told myself earlier about feeling right at home here again were starting to sound very false to me. It wasn't my house—not at all. I was painfully aware of Sarah at every turning. Even her toothbrush was in the bathroom still, her terrycloth robe on a hook. I'd brought some sleeping pills

with me just on the off chance that I might need them, and now I decided to take one. After a good night's sleep and before my flight home tomorrow I'd call Mr. Hawley and tell him about the missing paintings. Maybe even tell the police. Someone.

Before settling down in the little spare bedroom, I checked the doors and made several circuits of the house, an animal inspecting its lair, sniffing the air in every direction. I'd locked all the windows except for the ones in the room where I was sleeping, and I inspected those screens to make sure they were tightly secured. Only then did I take the small white pill. I thought for a moment and then took a second one, after which I made myself comfortable in bed with Laszlo Dietz. My concentration was brief. I remember looking at the bedside clock and seeing that it was ten past eleven when I turned the light out.

I was facing the illuminated dial when my eyes opened again and now I saw that it was four o'clock. I felt groggy and muddled from the pills and was sorry I'd taken them. What good were pills anyway when they made you feel worse, I grumbled silently, and when they let you wake up in the middle of the night? Or had something wakened me?

I looked quickly toward the windows but everything seemed secure there. The house was silent, nothing stirred. Yet I had the impression that there had *been* a sound, and that that was what had roused me. A car passing in the street? A late-returning neighbor opening a garage door? Possibly. I threw back the covers and got out of bed. I went to the window and looked out.

The two windows in my bedroom faced Jake Wharton's small house next door. Out beyond the corner of it I could see some of his back yard and the dock where I had watched him cleaning fish earlier. I held my breath, not moving, listening hard. And suddenly I heard a small quiet click. A door being closed carefully. Jake Wharton's back door? I swallowed.

I tiptoed out of the bedroom and down the tiny hall to the main studio room. There I could see through the big windows the expanse of the bay outside where the water moved and stirred, never entirely still. It carried its own silvery luminescence and that seemed to cast the room inside into even darker blackness. I could make out the shapes of the furniture—chairs, couch, table, all crouching and shadowy. At one end of the room Sarah's easel stood like a skeleton. There wasn't a sound except for my

own breathing, yet I felt something was wrong. Slowly I reached with a chilly hand for the wall switch. Light sprang from overhead, casting a sudden harsh glare over everything—easel, paints, sketches, chairs. And over Beatrice Worth of Bayview Realty, who sat slumped across the table by the window, her bright red hair fanning out, a thin-bladed knife sticking out of her back.

It would have helped if Detective Floyd Hopgood had been the type to inspire immediate confidence. Lean-jawed, whip-thin, with steely gray eyes that probed at once to the heart of the matter. Clint Eastwood. Instead he was about my height, overweight, and un-muscular. His shirt strained at its buttons across his considerable stomach, and he wore western boots and a bolo tie fastened with silver horns. His eyes were slits in a plump round face. Several chins trembled when he spoke.

"You met Mrs. Worth for the first time yesterday afternoon?" he asked. We were sitting in Sarah's small kitchen while in the studio room other policemen were working with Beatrice Worth's body. I supposed they were photographing, dusting for prints, doing routine things I'd seen on television countless times. There it was

only a small advancement of plot. Here it gave me a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach and turned my hands and feet to ice.

"Yes, when I arrived. We spoke very briefly."

"Then she came back in the middle of the night and let herself in, knowing someone was in the house?"

"No, she didn't know that. I hadn't planned to stay—only for a couple of hours. I mentioned that to her."

"What were you going to do during those couple of hours?"

"Just look over my cousin's papers and personal things. Mr. Hawley said it would be all right."

"So she thought you'd returned to your motel?"

"Yes. And I suppose she didn't see my car because I'd put it in the garage."

"Why'd you change your mind? Decide to stay here?"

"I began to feel more comfortable in the house. At first I'd felt a little uneasy, thinking about Sarah and all that."

"Then you'd made no appointment with Mrs. Worth?"

"Appointment!"

"You hadn't told her to meet you here later?"

"No! I didn't even know the woman!"

I was beginning to feel the first flutterings of panic. I didn't like the way the questioning

was going and I felt totally alone and helpless.

"Look here," I said. "Do you mind if I telephone Mr. William Hawley and ask him to come here? I don't know another soul in town and I'd really feel better if someone—"

"Officer Maclean has already called him."

"He has?"

"Yes, we knew he'd been Mrs. Cross's lawyer and that he'd helped with the funeral arrangements. Figured you might want him present."

I should have been appreciative, but Detective Hopgood was a little too take-charge for my taste. I'd have preferred to make my own call. Even so, I hadn't realized how much I was longing for the sight of a friendly face until Bill Hawley arrived. I greeted him like a long-lost relative when he appeared, looking pale and concerned, unshaven and with his shirt sticking out in back.

"Miss Fanning, I'm terribly sorry you got involved in all this. What happened, Hop?"

Hopgood went over the facts for him. At one point I interrupted to ask about the knife.

"Just a common fish knife. You won't find a house along here that doesn't have one. Of course we'll try to track it down."

"The man next door was using one to clean fish yesterday. I saw him." It seemed to me an

important clue, but Hopgood only shrugged. "Jake Wharton?" he said. "Sure, he probably was. Him and a couple dozen others along the beach, I imagine."

I started to tell about the sound of the door closing softly next door just before I found the body, but a police officer came in and said, "Multi-lock on the door all right."

Hopgood nodded and explained it to me—unnecessarily, for Bill Hawley had already done so as he saw me out of his office the day before.

"They're put on houses that are listed for sale," Bill Hawley had said. "Small lock box with the house key inside. Multiple listing, you see, all the agents carry the key to it. Much simpler for showing clients."

"Doesn't that lead to complications sometimes?" I asked Hopgood now. "I mean—you assume the agents are honest, but all the same—"

"Has once or twice," Hopgood said. "Remember that case over in St. Pete Beach, Bill? That was a multi-lock case. Agent cleaned out several houses—TV sets, silver, hi-fi's, even computers."

Hawley nodded. "Happens especially when it's old people who die and their families don't care enough to come here to settle the estate. Just get what you can for it and send me a check,

they'll say. I've heard that more than once. So of course there's no one keeping an eye on the property."

That seemed to me just one more sadness on top of all the others.

"Is this Bayview Realty a reputable firm?" I asked.

"Well, actually, she *was* Bayview Realty," Bill Hawley said. "Worked out of her house. But yes, reputable as far as I knew."

Hopgood looked at me again. "You said someone was here when you met her yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes. Some prospective buyer she was showing the place to. That's what she said."

He caught the doubt in my voice. "And wasn't she?"

"I thought maybe they were here for some other reason." Briefly, I told what I'd seen when I pushed the door open.

"Know his name?"

"She introduced him as Mr. Parkman."

"What'd he look like?"

I thought for a moment. "Sort of like a beach boy in a suit. Out of his element." I described him—the tan, the tight curls.

"Parkman," Hawley said thoughtfully.

"Know him?" Hopgood said.

"Not sure. Sounds a lot like a bartender at the Surf Club, down on the main beach strip in town. Beatrice Worth used to eat there sometimes, and I do

myself now and then. I've seen her looking pretty tight with him."

Hopgood wrote in a little notebook, then turned to me again. "You'll be around if we need you, Miss Fanning?"

"I was supposed to fly back to New York today," I said worriedly.

"We'd appreciate it if you'd put that off just temporarily," he said. His tone was polite but his chin quivered with considerable authority. I thought despairingly of Laszlo Dietz and the production schedule, turned up my hands, and agreed.

Iwould never have believed I could do it, but after everyone left I fell asleep. I had told them both—Hawley and the detective—that I'd be returning to the motel shortly—I certainly had no intention of spending another night in that house—but it was as if the last two days had suddenly caught up with me. That first shocking phone call, the hasty flight to Florida, the arrangements for the funeral. Being here in Sarah's house again and feeling her absence—and her presence. And then of course the awful events of the night and finding Beatrice Worth's body. All this crashing in on a life as humdrum as mine, where the biggest crisis I ever had to face was deciding which frozen dinner to

buy at the supermarket or how to placate a ruffled author—it was just too much. I dropped down with heavy weariness onto the rumpled bed I'd left hours before, and was asleep before I knew what was happening. If the telephone hadn't wakened me I'd probably have slept right through the day.

"Miss Fanning?" I recognized Detective Hopgood's voice.

"Yes." I was foggy, but I gripped the telephone hard and tried to concentrate.

"Thought I'd let you know we picked up Parkman—the bartender who was with Beatrice Worth when you saw her there."

"Did he do it?" I asked.

"We found him packing—getting ready to leave town. We've got him in custody. Says he didn't kill her, but that's likely to change, we think."

"Why?"

"He's already changed his story once. First he said he heard about the murder on the radio this morning. Then he admitted he had a date to meet her there at the house last night and when he arrived he found her dead. Meanwhile he's given us a pretty good picture of their operation. She'd been stealing from empty houses right along, apparently. Parkman was just window dressing. She'd put him in a suit and bring him along so if anybody came in on them he could pose

as a prospective buyer. Just the way it happened with you. And of course the two of them had a little something going on the side."

"Oh, obviously," I said, wide awake now.

"I'm sending a couple of men out to her place to see what they can find. My guess is it'll be full of stolen goods."

"I wonder if that's what happened to my cousin's paintings."

"Paintings?"

"Yes, she was an artist."

"I realize that. Were they valuable?"

"They were gaining in value," I said. "In time I think they would have been worth a great deal."

"How many are missing?"

"At least six. Maybe a great many more."

"We'll let you know what we find. Are you staying there tonight? I thought you were going to a motel."

"I am. Just as soon as I can pack." I thanked him and hung up.

I took a shower, made the bed, and packed my bag again, getting ready to leave. Then I walked through the house, studiously averting my eyes from the table in the studio where Beatrice had lain, but giving a last searching look for some place I might have missed. Some spot where Sarah's paintings

might be concealed. Of course they were probably stacked in Beatrice Worth's garage and I'd be hearing that for a fact before I left for New York. But if she already had the paintings, what was she doing here in the middle of the night? That was just one of the things nibbling at the edge of my mind right then, making me uneasy. And something else was there, too, nudging and persistent. Something I couldn't quite get hold of. I paused in front of the big windows that fronted the bay and looked out. The day had gone dark and unpromising. Mist hovered over the water and there was a low gray cloud cover. Sounds were muffled, even the screams of the gulls. I saw Jake Wharton on his dock. He was getting into his small dinghy, carrying fishing gear. I watched him push off and pick up the oars, watched as he rowed with strong methodical strokes out into the bay.

Suddenly I knew what was bothering me, the thing that wouldn't leave me, the thing that gnawed and nudged. That soft closing of a door that I'd heard in the night. For a moment I stood there watching the dinghy growing smaller and smaller in the distance. Then I left my suitcase in the middle of the floor, let myself out the side door that led to the yard

and garden, the small dock, and tiptoed across the grass to Jake Wharton's house. I have no idea why I tiptoed.

I tried the back door and found it locked. I went around to the garage doors in the front; they were locked, too. There was a window in the garage, a regular double-hung window. I tried that. It stuck for a minute, and then it came open, flying up so suddenly that it made me jump. I glanced behind me, out across the bay to the boat, tiny and indistinct in the mist. Then I caught my breath nervously and climbed over the window-sill.

It was an ordinary garage much like Sarah's, with a Jeep Cherokee sitting in it and with tools and a workbench against the far end. The tools were neatly hung and the workbench was orderly and looked as if it were used frequently. Against one side wall was a shelf with paint cans and brushes, turpentine—again, the usual. What you'd expect to find in a garage. I circled around the Jeep to see what was on the other wall. Whatever it was was shrouded in a heavy dropcloth. I picked up one corner of the cloth and looked under it. Canvases were stacked there, several of them on stretchers, all turned to the wall. I turned one. It was blank. I looked at the others. All blank. A cardboard carton was beside

them. I looked into it and the dull gleam of antique silver winked back at me. A teapot, and one I recognized at once. It had belonged to Grandmother Fanning. Sarah, as the eldest, had inherited it. We had served ourselves tea from it the year before, setting the table grandly and talking family talk. Next to the carton was a little console table, also familiar, made of cherry and with delicate turnings on the legs. I hadn't even noticed it was missing, but that had been in the family, too, and Sarah had cherished it. There were some other cartons; I looked into them briefly. A few more pieces of old silver, a little rosewood lap desk. Not a sign of the missing paintings; they were probably in the house somewhere. I went to the door connecting the garage with the house, but it was locked. Nervously I went to the window, stuck my head out and looked over the water. The mist was thickening. I could see only a short distance now. If Jake Wharton had caught sight of me, he might already be rowing in toward shore.

Reluctantly, I climbed out through the window and hurried back to the telephone. Detective Hopgood was out, I was told. Would I speak to someone else or leave a message? I said I would call back, slammed the phone down, and went to the

window to see if I could spot the dinghy, but there was still no sign of it. I was probably worrying unnecessarily. The fog had hidden me, hadn't it, just as it had him?

The knock at the front door was quiet, but I gave a frightened leap when I heard it. I hurried to look out through the narrow side window and saw Bill Hawley. "I thought you'd be back at the motel by now, but when I called there they said no." He had had time to shave and change and looked his old reassuring self. "I don't really like the idea of you hanging around here," he said.

"I fell asleep, believe it or not," I admitted shakily. "And then when I got up I did a little snooping on my own. You won't believe this, Mr. Hawley—"

"Bill," he said.

"Bill. But I really think I've got it figured out. Only I couldn't reach Detective Hopgood just now when I called."

"May have gone to pick up that Parkman fellow."

"No, they have him in custody already. Hopgood called a while ago to tell me so. They expect to get a confession out of him, only I'm pretty sure they won't because he didn't do it, and I know who did. The garage next door is loaded with stuff that belonged to Sarah. And Wharton was sneaking around here last night, I heard him."

"Jake Wharton?" Bill Hawley sounded shocked.

"Yes. I got in through a window and found the stuff just now when he was out fishing. But he may be on his way back, and if he suspects anything—"

"Were the missing paintings there, too?"

I turned quickly and looked out over the water again, trying to slow my breathing and keep my thinking straight. There was still no sign of Wharton. "No," I said, "But they could be in the house. I couldn't get in to look."

I turned back to him, studying him as he stood there, plump and homey-looking in his neat suit, glasses glinting so that his eyes were lost behind them.

"I'll try the police again," I said.

"I wouldn't bother," he said in a curious flat voice. And then he said softly, "Damn. I made a mistake, didn't I?"

Just as softly I said, "Yes. I'm afraid you did. I never told you about any missing paintings. I told Hopgood, but you haven't talked to him, have you? You didn't even know Parkman was in custody."

He sighed. "You *would* have to be one of those smart young things. Well, it doesn't matter now. We'll straighten this out between us. So the old duffer next door has them." He shook his head. "Who'd have thought

he had enough sense to swipe the good stuff?"

"That was your part of it, wasn't it?" I whispered. "To know what was valuable?"

"I have a good bit of taste," he admitted. "And of what's likely to go up in value over a period of time. But Beatrice was like a magpie—greedy, you know. She'd grab everything in sight if I didn't watch her. I made the mistake of mentioning the paintings to her after Sarah died, and all she heard was the word valuable. One thing was like another to her. I will say, though, I put her in the way of picking up some very good stuff over the last couple of years." There was a faint note of pride in his voice, I thought.

"And handling estates as you did, you knew which places to direct her to—the ones where distant relatives weren't likely to know what was missing—"

"Yes, that was more or less it," he said. "I had you figured a bit off, I must admit. Young busy career woman in New York. I thought you'd want the house sold off quickly and that would be it. I didn't figure on sentimental attachments," he added dryly.

"I interrupted her, I suppose, arriving unexpectedly the way I did. So she came here last night looking for the paintings." I looked helplessly in the

direction of the telephone, which stood on a table six feet away from me.

"Possibly." He frowned. "And since she always liked to combine business with pleasure, I suppose she was going to meet her lover here, too." Parkman, I thought. The golden-haired beach boy, who had crowded Hawley out of Beatrice Worth's life. "They were going away together, that's what she told me. So long Bill, it's been fun, that's what she said."

"You followed her here," I breathed.

"I did, yes—never dreamed you were here, of course. Just imagine, you were right down at the end of the hall and never heard a thing."

"Sleeping pills," I murmured, and looked toward the side door. I would certainly have a better chance outdoors than trapped here in the house. Of course I had locked the door, worrying about Jake Wharton, shutting out a small-time thief and locking myself in with a murderer. My mouth was becoming so dry I didn't think I'd be able to keep stalling with amiable small-talk much longer. I took a deep breath and made a dive for the door, turning the lock and wrenching the door open in one quick motion. But not quick enough. One polyester-clad arm came around me, choking off my breathing before I

could let out a yell.

And then, astonishingly, something was looming up out of the mist and the grayness, filling the doorway, seizing Hawley's arm and twisting it behind his back. Jake Wharton, wiry and skinny as a snake, all ropy muscles and a good fifteen years older than Hawley, had him down on the floor and was trussing him up with fishing line before I could utter a word.

"Now just lay quiet there, buster," he said calmly. "That nylon'll cut like a knife if you go to thrashing around." He glanced up at me, his seamed face scarcely flushed. "I guess it might be a good idea to get those cops back now."

Jake Wharton and I sat together on Sarah's small dock, our legs hanging off the edge because it was low tide. The morning fog had burned off and left, along with the police and Bill Hawley. Out over the water three pelicans were doing their baggy-pants comic turns, diving for fish, landing awkwardly, then flapping their wings wildly and managing against all odds to take off again.

"I got to thinking maybe I'd been a little hard on you," he admitted. "But I just couldn't stand it that everybody was flocking around like gulls after fish innards—I mean, that's the

way I saw it. I'd had my suspicions about that Hawley right along. Sarah was such a fine person, but she trusted people too much. And now she was gone, here was everybody johnny-at-the-rathole ready to carry off her stuff. You most of all, I thought. But then I reasoned on it and I decided no, that wasn't right. Sarah—she was fond of you. Talked about you a lot, and I decided maybe I should give you a chance. Maybe you weren't like the others. Maybe you were more like her."

"Oh no. I'm not nearly as good a person as Sarah was."

He seemed willing to agree with this, but then he said, "Well, she thought you were. And I told myself I mustn't go flying off half-cocked that way just because I was so blind crazy at losing her."

Losing her? The words hung in the air like gulls idling in a wind. He must have seen the question in my face, for he said quietly, "Me and Sarah, we were going to get married, see. That's why she'd put her place up for sale. My house is plenty big for two, and she could've had her own room for painting—hell, she could have had the whole house. All I cared about was having her with me so I could take care of her. I knew she wasn't strong, but I thought with me looking after

her she might have—you know, more time. When I saw her keel over right on this dock—she was sketching—” His mouth tightened and he shook his head. “I live that scene over and over in my head, trying to make it come out different. I don’t know as I’ll ever get rid of it.”

“That’s why her things were stored in your garage,” I said, and then went on to confess to him how I’d found them.

“Oh yeah, I saw you from the boat. Good thing, too. That’s why I came back in a hurry.”

“Oh Mr. Wharton—Jake, if you hadn’t!”

“Well, I did,” he said dryly. “Yes, she’d brought over some extra canvases, one or two pieces of furniture. Some things she treasured—old silver and like that. I told her she should get it out of the way if people were going to be tramping through looking at her house. We were real happy, making our plans.”

“And last night? I was sure I heard your door. Were you over here?”

He nodded. “I didn’t know you were staying there. I saw lights early in the evening, but I thought you’d taken what you wanted and gone back to your motel or whatever.”

“So did everyone else,” I murmured.

“Never occurred to me you might stay. I came over, let

myself in with a key I had from Sarah, but then when I looked in the garage I saw your car, so I beat it.”

“And all the time *she* must have been—”

He nodded silently and we both thought about Beatrice Worth.

“I don’t know why I woke then,” I said, shaking my head. “There certainly was enough traffic in and out before you came. I can only guess it must have been the pills I took.”

“Those damn things,” he said scornfully.

“Never again,” I said. We watched another pelican dive, big feet outstretched for braking. “What did you come over for last night?” I asked then.

He squinted at me. “The paintings, of course. Sarah’s paintings.”

“Aren’t they already in your house? Don’t you have them?”

He shook his head. “She was going to bring them over but she hadn’t got around to it when she died, and then of course the house was listed for sale—people were showing up unexpectedly—I couldn’t just march over and start lugging things out of the house—”

“But they’re missing! *Someone’s* taken them.”

He smiled faintly, the first time I’d seen his face show any light.

“They’re in there—in her

house," he said quietly. "I hid 'em—had my suspicions about Hawley and that woman. Be damned if I'd let them carry her things off. Figured it wasn't likely they'd find 'em either. You didn't," he added slyly and the smile improved a little.

"Jake! Where are they? I looked everywhere."

"Come on. I'll show you."

He led the way into the garage. "Might be easier if you was to move the car out." I did so, and by the time I returned he had already set up a ladder and started unfastening the dinghy from where it was suspended on ceiling hooks. When he had lowered it, he removed a tarpaulin and there lay canvases, some on stretchers, some rolled, one package wrapped in brown paper and addressed to the New York gallery—all Sarah Cross's vibrant, sun-struck work spread out before us, personal and alive. It was as if Sarah herself had suddenly entered the garage. All the beauty that she had seen was there; birds and water, sky, sun, sand—and all the laughter, too, for I saw three pelicans clowning—they might have

been the same three we had been watching just now.

I made a sudden decision.

"I want you to have them, Jake," I said. "They mean more to you than anyone."

He shook his head slowly. "Nope. They're yours. You're family, and it's right that you have them. Send them to that gallery if you want to—that way people will get to see them. The other stuff, too, that's in my house. You should have it. There's only one thing I want, and I know where it is." He walked ahead of me into the house and straight to the easel where the unfinished sketch stood. Roughly outlined was a dock and a man standing beside it in a loose easy posture—unmistakably Jake; even in this tenuous sketch it possessed Jake's stamp. Sarah had caught him in a few spare lines—a fisherman getting his gear together, squinting into the sun to judge the day's weather.

"That's me Sarah was drawing. That's how she saw me. Unfinished, but then, so were we. That's all I want."

"Oh Jake," I said, and put a hand on his arm.

Put A Little Mystery In Your Next Vacation!

Join Us For A Week Full of Sun
And So Much Fun It's Almost Criminal!

The First Annual
Davis Mystery Magazines'
Mystery Cruise

Aboard Norwegian Cruise Line's Newest Luxury Liner
M.S. Seaward

March 26 to April 2, 1989

Sail the fabulous Western Caribbean from Miami, to NCL's private island paradise. Then it's on to Ocho Rios, Jamaica; Georgetown, British Grand Cayman and Playa del Carmen and Cozumel on the Yucatan Peninsula.

Aboard ship will be mystery writers Thomas Adcock and Doug Allyn, who will add to the week's fun with seminars on mystery. Mystery trivia contests and movie classics will be an exciting part of the scheduled activities. Be the first to solve the crime and win a fabulous prize. If you love mystery and have always wanted to tour the beautiful western Caribbean, you can't miss this fabulous Mystery Cruise.

Prices For This Marvelous, Mysterious Maiden Voyage Include Round Trip Air Fare and Start at only

\$1,045

(PPDO, From Most Major Cities. Limited Availability in many categories; First Come First Served.)

To be part of this fabulous week and receive all the gifts and other special amenities you must be part of the Davis Publications Mystery Magazine Group and book your cruise exclusively through:

OMNI GROUP CRUISES, Inc.

6513 Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, CA 90028.
Write or call for more information (800) 876-OMNI

Please send me more information about this Mystery Cruise

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip Code _____

Two Person Lake

by Mort Mason



I have to tell you that I was skeptical, to the point of open laughter, the first time I heard of Two Person Lake. The look on Old Jack's face, however, was enough to stop that in a hurry.

Old Jack was really Jack Duranzo, an Alaska sourdough who had, years before, hand fashioned birch and babiche showshoes for L.L. Bean back in Maine. The north country was, and still is, virtually filled with "Jacks." Kenai Jack, Rus-

sian Jack, One-Eyed Jack, Ek-lunta Jack—the list is impressive. And so is each of these unique and legendary characters. Old Jack was maybe just one of many, but he was certainly colorful. And he was a good friend.

Old Jack was, by the time I met him, well into his seventies. I had first seen him carelessly thrown over one of the broad shoulders of Big Bill Roberts, a bull of a man, who was carrying a very drunk and

nearly comatose Old Jack over three miles of snow-covered nighttime trail from Lower Russian Lake to the settlement of Cooper Landing on the Kenai Peninsula. Seems Bill was afraid that Old Jack was gonna die on him, clearly from the effects of too much whisky, and Bill didn't want that passing to occur in the remote lodge where he wintered all alone in the cold Alaska night.

Burying Old Jack wasn't the problem because, after having laid him out flat, Bill could have frozen him in a manageable configuration and simply stacked him in the corner of the tool shed along with the shovels, stariskis, and salmon fishing gear until the spring thaw made digging a little less arduous a task. No, it was because Bill firmly believed that Old Jack's shade would haunt him from then on. So over the cold, dark trail they moved, frail Old Jack dead to the world and big Bill huffin' and puffin' like a spring grizzly.

We nearly met head-on about midway of the trail. I was mushing in while Bill and his unconscious burden were outbound. We decided that a smoke break was called for while Bill explained his mission to me.

Bill was carrying a little antifreeze, too, I noticed, and I was able to cajole him out of his task, telling him that I was

pretty sure that a piece of rawhide like Old Jack would pull through, given a little rest and a warm spot in which to sleep it off. Since carrying Old Jack another half hour away from the lodge didn't tickle Bill much more than sitting as we were in twenty inches of snow on a freezing mountainside, he decided that a return to the lodge made a certain amount of mid-winter sense. Besides, he'd left in such a rush with his limp and unresponsive load that he had neglected to bring any trail hooch. He had discovered that lugging Old Jack's limber carcass was thirsty work, spooks and ghosts or no.

The next morning Bill rustled around with breakfast makings while a moderately recovered, but definitely living, Old Jack sat scowling at the roaring barrel stove. I had earlier taken an ice auger up to the lake and, after screwing it down through thirty inches of green ice, had coaxed half a dozen winter rainbow trout up from the freezer. These, with eggs, bacon, toast, and black lodge coffee, would set things right with everyone.

After the dishes had been cleared away—that is to say, tossed out of sight in the deep galvanized sink, for Bill wintered without benefit of a nagging housekeeper in this isolated valley—we sat around chewing

more lodge coffee, smoking roll-your-owns, and lying about nearly everything and everybody we knew. That's when Old Jack asked me if I'd ever flown over to Two Person Lake. Said a friend of his had gone swimming there a time ago.

I'd never heard of the place, and admitted it. Now, that's hard, because Alaska's bush pilots are supposed to know all about everyplace and to have been there at least twice, usually in bad weather. But, whether or not I knew of any Two Person Lake, I doubted that any sane man would swim in it. Alaska's lakes are definitely not for the casual backstroker.

Old Jack, still pale enough to warrant some concern, was silent for a few moments and then said, in a funny quiet voice, "You don't swim Two Person lessen yer dead." Just like that.

Now, Alaska is populated with only two classes of people, old-timers and relative newcomers. Briefly, sourdoughs and cheechakos. Although I had flown the Alaska back country for a few years, I had certainly arrived there after the Talkeetna Mountains had been formed. That was good enough to classify me a cheechako, as far as Old Jack was concerned.

Old Jack was truly reluctant to talk about Two Person Lake,

even though he had been first to mention the place. In my own defense, let me say that Bill hadn't heard of it either. By alternately milking Old Jack like a rattlesnake and threatening him with extinction, we got him to string enough words together to paint a picture of the place.

Crystal clear, he said, and cold beyond imagination, though the lake never froze during winter, which, in the Alaska interior, often reached sixty degrees below zero. North of Stony River and south of White Mountain, the lake lay on the western slope of the Alaska Range. Old Jack had tried trapping the valley one winter, even though he had found no beaver or muskrat sign. Sterile, he said. And spooky. No mink, no 'rats, no marten, no otter, no nothin'. No fish, either. Nor birds. Just nothing.

On his way out of that strange valley, Old Jack had cut the trail of another trapper and had followed that track into a Siwash camp tucked away in a small stand of Sitka spruce. Old Jack had approached the camp openly, but with a mountain man's ingrained caution.

The welcome from the make-shift camp was open, too. "Howdy," came the soft call. "Heard yer trail shoes comin' 'bout a quarter mile back. Hot coffee if ya want."

Old Jack could see half a dozen number two Victors hanging from a spruce pole tied between two standing trees. Other than that, the trapper was moving through the late Alaska winter pretty light.

"Name's Peter. Come up from Goodnews Bay. Gonna give it up, though. Mushin' on back to da coast. Rest up a little before da herring run."

"Old Jack, from Kenai. Been pokin' around in Two Person. Not much in there, though."

"Two Person Lake? Nothin' at all, more likely. We don't go dere." By "we" he presumably meant the Aleuts, Aleutian Indians, southwestern Alaska's age-old inhabitants. "Bad place. Dead people live in dere."

"Nobody much at all, I seen," said Old Jack. "Dead or 'live."

"Dey live in water," Peter mumbled.

Nothing more was said about it that night. After washing down, with strong boiled trail coffee, the two rabbits Old Jack had shot with the .22 Colt Woodsman he perpetually kept in his pack, they took time for an evening smoke. Neither spoke, which was not unusual. Not much left to talk about with the icy mountains hemming them in on all sides and families of wolves making cold talk along the ridges. At thirty below, the occasional rifle crack of a splitting spruce was

sound enough for them.

Old Jack fluffed up his surplus army down bag while Peter fussed with a caribou robe. Soon both men were sleeping as soundly as ever mountain men sleep.

Next morning, after only a small fire and black coffee, they loaded up and lit out. Peter headed southwest for Tickchik, Nuyakuk Lake, and a pass which he knew would lead him over Togiak Lake and let him skirt the southern end of the Ahklun Mountains. Old Jack was aiming for Stony River and Sleetmute, from which point he figured to hitch a ride with one of the bush pilots going to Anchorage. Typically, there were no goodbyes between the two. And if they met again along some distant trail in another ten years, there would be no back-slapping hellos, either. So they lived and so they would vanish, these mountain creatures.

Over the years, I guess I've made nearly a dozen charter flights to Two Person Lake. It became a sort of specialty with me, probably because not many cared to fly into that valley. I'm used to it now. I came to appreciate, early on, that nothing would change the traditions of a people who were living off this land, and giving something back

to it, long before the Russian fur traders began their decimation of Alaska's coastal sea otters.

The first flight to Two Person began, as do most flights, with a telephone call. I grabbed it on the third ring, although I was sitting beside the phone when it began to jangle. I didn't want to appear as eager for business as I really was, but more than three rings in the very competitive air taxi business was dangerous: Only my creditors hold on for ten rings.

"Whitmore."

"Dis Whitmore?" I was pretty sure that this was a village call, but it was not a radiotelephone patch, with its usual delays and background noises.

"You got 'im. What can I do for you?"

"You know Swift River?" Getting closer—my caller was probably in McGrath, Aniak, Lime Village, or maybe Bethel.

"Like the back of my hand," I said.

"Dis Jimmy David. Dey say you fly good." Missionary influence, good Christian names.

"I'm still with it, Jimmy. How can I help you?"

"You know Sleetmute, Mr. Whitmore?" I'm Denzel Marcus Whitmore, helluva name for a bush pilot.

"Call me Marc. Yeah, I know Sleetmute. Know Crooken and Red Devil and Stony, too. Where

you need to go, Jimmy?"

"I meet you in da river at Sleetmute tomorra, 'bout ten o'clock, okay?"

"Cash flight, Jimmy. Can you make that?"

"Ten o'clock. You make plenty money." And the line went dead.

This wasn't a particularly strange conversation. It was typical of most village calls, except this one wasn't a radio patch, as they usually are. Maybe Jimmy David was calling from Aniak's school, who knows.

I pulled the McGrath Sectional chart and decided that Merrill Pass was as good a route as any, although Rainy might be a better route back. Unless the charter was for a round trip. Well, tomorrow would tell me that.

I spent the rest of the afternoon tinkering with an oil and filter change on the Cessna Stationaire II floatplane and shut the office down early. *Gun-smoke* was on at five thirty in those days, and I didn't want to miss it.

I was off the water at Anchorage's Lake Hood at seven thirty the following morning, after throwing six cans of hundred-octane avgas in the back of the plane. The weather was good, so I didn't have to punch up through an overcast to cross the Alaska Range over the top. That was great be-

cause, although eight thousand feet would have given me a shorter trip, I've always enjoyed banging through Merrill Pass. Besides, too much altitude flying steals from my familiarity with the back country. It would scare me spitless to think that I would lose that. When the weather is duck-walking bad, that's the only navigational aid most of us have left.

Dropping down out of Merrill Pass a while later, I skirted Two Lakes and crossed the Stony River for a direct shot over Lime Village to Sleetmute, another fifty-five minutes out.

I amused myself by counting caribou, moose, and half a dozen brown bear. Nothing great for size, though. Too early. The big ones were still high up, away from the bugs and flies.

At Sleetmute, I circled the trading post and noticed a local riverboat pulled up in the slough just upstream. Two figures stood alongside the boat, but neither waved. That wasn't uncommon, either. After all, they expected to see a floatplane arrive at ten o'clock and I expected to see passengers. Or a pile of freight, of course. This time it looked like just two passengers, a pretty light load for the Cessna 206.

I checked the water rudder, went ten degrees on the flaps, and checked the mixture at full rich. I had decided on a down-

stream landing, for no really good reason beyond its convenience to my flight path. Turning to the final leg, I went twenty degrees with the flaps, checked the fuel selector for the fuller tank again, and screwed the prop control to its high pitch position, full in.

Downstream landings are my favorites. Smooth, almost always. This one was no different, and I soon had the water rudders down, turned left out of the main current, and nudged the toes of the floats up onto the beach, having cut the power several yards out.

Jimmy David, for I supposed that was who the older man was, dropped a line over one of the forward cleats and tied off to a small willow atop the nearby cut bank while I made my log entry. This done, I slipped the seat belt, rolled my seat rearward, and slid out the door.

"You got good wedder," Jimmy David said.

"All my weather's good, Jimmy. Whatcha got for me?"

"Small box 'n dis boy gonna go ta Two Person Lake. After dat, you go back home."

"Not much of a load for this old hog, Jimmy. That all you got?"

"You come down, we talk," he replied.

We both sat on one of the gunwales of his twenty foot riverboat, neither speaking for a

while. There is a certain protocol to these matters. I certainly wasn't going to break it with a potential continuing client.

"You know 'bout Two Person Lake?" Jimmy asked.

"Know 'bout where it is, Jimmy. What's to know? Just another big old wet spot."

"Two Person special place. Many go. All stay."

"What the hell's that mean, Jimmy? There's no village there, I know that much about it."

"Dead people live dere. Live in water."

A burial place? That's the second time I'd heard that. Only this time, sitting on a remote gravel bar a million miles from nowhere, my hackles rose a little. Jimmy David was scared serious, and I could tell it. My passenger, for I presumed him to be that, a boy of maybe nineteen or so, stood apart from us staring at the silty river.

"Thought you said I had a passenger," I said, looking toward the young man at the water's edge.

"One passenger 'n one box," he replied.

"Talk to me, Jimmy. What's goin' on here? He comin' back, or what?"

"You take box. You take boy. You stop in middle of lake. Open box 'n pour in water. You keep box. You go home." Nothing more from this old Indian.

"The boy's goin' on to Anchorage then, huh?"

"How much money you want?" asked Jimmy, ignoring me completely.

"Eight hundred fifty bucks, Jimmy. Lotta money. Why didn't you get one of the boys from Red Devil? The Vander-mans are old hands at flyin' the Stony River country. Save you some money."

"Dis twenny-five hunnert. You keep. You go now. Boy ready, box ready." He handed me the box, really more of a grass basket. It was about eight inches by eight inches by twelve inches. It had a small leather clasp held in place by what I took for a polished caribou antler tip.

It was a fine example of grass work. I had seen many of these grass baskets, some bringing more than three thousand dollars in Anchorage. I'd never seen one which wasn't round, however. And I didn't know they were available in the interior. I thought they all came from the Aleutian Islands and the small coastal communities. Still, maybe I could turn it into a few bucks when I got back to Anchorage. What the heck, he said to keep it.

When he handed me the folded wad of bills, he looked directly into my eyes for the first time. For just a moment I thought I was looking past the legendary

land bridge, beyond Mongolia and into a past so dark and ancient as to be beyond history. Something cold slithered across the top of my stomach, deep inside. It swam away, leaving a dark spot behind. A dark spot that I could actually feel.

When Jimmy stood up, the boy turned and walked directly to the plane, stepped up on the left float, and slid in, crossing the pilot's seat to occupy the right front. He immediately buckled himself in, then sat quietly, staring straight ahead. Because of the way in which the plane was pitched nose up on the beach, I knew he couldn't see anything except blue sky through the windshield. This kid really had something on his mind. Or his mind was a complete blank, one or the other.

Jimmy took his line off the float cleat, turned, and went to his boat without a backward glance. Shrugging my shoulders, I pushed the plane off the beach just enough to turn it around and lifted the heels of the floats back up on the beach. That would hold us until the three hundred horses could pull us into midstream for the take-off.

For a few minutes I was busy with the boost pump, water rudders, flaps, and the like. When I had the engine started and had begun to move slowly into the channel, Jimmy David

was already gone. I don't remember having heard his boat's motor, and I sure as hell didn't see him leave, either upriver or down.

I pointed the plane upstream, glanced to see that my passenger was belted in, advanced the throttle to the firewall, and unscrewed the mixture control to get best exhaust gas temperature. The nose went up, then over, and we were on the step. I moved the flap selector to twenty degrees and let the plane fly itself off the water, rolling into a shallow left turn to pick up about zero-seven-zero degrees on the directional gyro.

I had estimated the flight to take about forty-five minutes, close enough for government work. It was the most uncomfortable forty-five minutes I'd ever spent in the left seat. The only word I'd been able to get from my passenger was "John." This was in response to my direct question about his name. Not a word more.

I busied myself with nothing, as most pilots do on such flights. There are precious few radio facilities in Alaska's interior, so who's to talk to? The weather was cloudless and brilliant as only the low humidity interior weather can be. The distant Alaska Range, growing slowly closer, is perpetually snow-capped and was as strikingly awesome as always. At two

thousand feet, the air was so smooth that flying was almost boring.

After half an hour of this uncomfortable silence I could see the southern slope of the foothills which I knew concealed Two Person Lake from our southwestern approach. These hills, slightly north of our course, rose to more than four thousand, but we wouldn't be going that far north. About six minutes out, we skirted a three thousand foot knob and, slightly to our left, I could make out what I knew to be Two Person Lake. I glanced at John's seat belt again, even though he hadn't moved a muscle since we'd started.

I unlocked the throttle, glanced down at the fuel selector, and eased off to about twelve hundred revolutions per minute. I rolled in just a tad of nose up trim and trimmed slightly for a little left rudder to compensate for the reduced power setting. We were descending directly toward the lake by that time.

Although Jimmy David had told me to shut down in the middle of the lake, I wanted to get a look at the shoreline and check water depth, but I could see no bottom anywhere. What's more, there was no inlet or outlet to the lake. Ink blue and seemingly deep without limit, it was incredible. The next in-

stant I was questioning my sanity.

The lake was suddenly a bedlam of whitecaps and breakers. I checked my shoulder harness at the same time I researched my memory. Hadn't this lake been mirror smooth less than ten seconds earlier? But the air was still as smooth as silk. Tucked between two ridges as this lake was, it all seemed impossible.

The wind on the surface seemed to be from the north, so I rolled into a left turn and began a downwind, pre-landing checklist. Mixture full rich, flaps at ten degrees, check the full tank indication and selector, more trim with a tad less power and stable at eighty knots.

As I rolled out a little later on short final, showing seventy-five knots and with flaps now at twenty degrees, I judged the wind at about twenty knots. This was quite a bit, but I didn't think it was too much, given that we wouldn't have to make any turns after our landing.

Carrying a little power for the landing, we hit the first three or four crests with a series of jolts. When it felt solid, I dumped the flaps, slapped the cowl flaps open, and came full back on the yoke. And just as quickly as that, the lake was mirror calm! It didn't seem to become less rough—it was just dead calm.

We came down off the step, I dropped the water rudders, and shut the engine down immediately, looking at John for his reaction to this phenomenon. Absolutely nothing. He might as well have been sound asleep. Young John was truly out to lunch.

It took only seconds for the plane to glide to a stop, by which time I saw that we weren't leaving a wake on the calm surface. Nor had we left any sort of disturbance behind us. This wasn't happening. It just couldn't happen this way.

As I switched off the mags, the only sound was the familiar ticking of a cooling engine. Belt off, seat rolled back, I opened the door and stepped down onto the float, stretching. I moved aft far enough to allow John to slide out, duck under the lift strut, and move forward to stand near the toe of the float.

When I looked down into the now greasy, calm water, trying to get some feeling for its depth, I noticed that it had become pretty dark around us. I looked up—and saw a solid overcast at about six hundred feet, the blackest clouds I'd ever seen.

They boiled and rolled without direction, almost as though they were self generating. I was certain that the sky above this entire valley had been crystal clear only minutes before. What's more, I realized that I

was hearing a howling wind, even though the lake surface showed not a single ripple. I looked toward the nearest shoreline, about two hundred yards to the west. There was a stand of large cottonwood trees there, and not a leaf was moving. Nonetheless, that shrieking had to be an air mass hitting trees somewhere. Wind simply doesn't make that sort of racket until it hits something.

Then the lake surface itself began to move. Not in ripples, as though disturbed by the wind, but in an undulating vertical motion. It seemed that huge bubbles were about to break the surface everywhere. The whole lake was alive with this movement. As near as I could estimate it, the swells were nearly eight feet from crests to troughs. The water around the plane, however, remained still and flat and slick looking, almost oily. I glanced at John and saw that he appeared to be still off somewhere, lost in his own world.

As quickly as this turmoil had begun, it all stopped. Almost instantly I missed the shrieking of the wind and, looking up, saw the roiling cloud mass had somehow stilled to a flat, monochromatic overcast. It was as though our whole world had suddenly been frozen inside a glass cube. Not a sound, no motion of any sort—nothing.

Just an end of the world nothing.

I found that I was breathing through my mouth in an effort to pick up some small sound. Even white sound. Nothing. I was rendered deaf, mute, and still, it seemed. Frozen in the most frightening moment of my life. I wouldn't have looked over my shoulder just then for a million dollars.

I don't know how long I stood transfixed by this phenomenon. Maybe for only seconds, maybe for a long, long time. Even time had been stricken in this horrible vacuum and I admit now that I had lost all track of it.

When I finally gathered a few of my wits about me, I remembered the grass basket lying on the passenger seat just behind the pilot's seat. To get to it, I had to move forward along the float with some care. I had somehow lost a lot of my coordination. It seemed as though my legs might buckle unless I locked my knees as I walked, and I was certain that I was about to convulse in the thighs.

Carefully picking the small basket off the seat, I noticed it felt extremely cold. Wanting to get this whole thing over with as quickly as possible, I stepped back out onto the float, turned, and knelt down, removing the small horn latch. Turning the basket so that it faced away from me, I leaned over and

tipped it so that the contents would spill into the lake.

At first I thought I was pouring sand, or maybe gray dust, into the inky water. Then a few larger pieces spilled out, strangely without making even the smallest ripple on the dead, black surface.

My God! I was pouring the cremated remains of something, or someone, into that strange and hungry water. This was a burial! I saw a piece of gold bridgework, then a few more bone shards. By the time I noticed that my hands, strangely, were not shaking, it was over. Where I expected to see some dusty gray residue left on the surface, there was nothing. It dawned on me that this lake was full of that—nothing.

I glanced at John on the toe of the float. If I had been anywhere else in the world, I would have leaped straight out into the lake. John was as still and as motionless as a post. Reaching up from the dark water, and wrapped firmly around his left ankle, was the largest human hand that I have ever seen. Almost human, that is.

I didn't wonder then, and I don't wonder now, what might have been attached to that dreadful thing farther down. It was nearly black, very, very old, and almost one foot across. It was covered with coarse, reddish-brown hair which must

have been more than six inches long. And it didn't move.

My heart was hammering as though it might explode at any moment, and I seemed to have lost my peripheral vision. I looked up at John, who had now awakened enough to look calmly down at the thing wrapped around his ankle. As he stared at it, the huge hand slowly released its grip and slid down over the outside of the float to disappear in the blackness below. I stared for a moment, horror stricken, at the spot where the loathsome thing had vanished, and then looked up just as John stepped off the float and disappeared.

There was no splash, there was no sound, and there followed no bubbles. I remember thinking how strange it was that even John's clothing wouldn't give up a few bubbles. How could that terrible body of water cause bubbles to sink?

I realized that the sun was again bright in a clear, blue sky. Everything that had just transpired had been almost completely erased, just as quickly as that.

I placed the small basket, now for some reason definitely warm to the touch, on the passenger seat next to where I would sit while flying. I certainly didn't want that thing on the seat behind me where I couldn't see it.

My takeoff was just another departure, one of thousands over the years. I circled the lake just once, now that I felt free of it with a few hundred vertical feet separating us. As I flew the length of the lake along its western shore, it was again a chaos of whitecaps. Once I reached the southern end of it, a span of maybe twenty seconds, the water was once more absolutely still.

During the flight back to Anchorage, I had an opportunity to think about that small basket on the seat next to me. Although it might have made a marvelous, if ghoulish, keepsake, I had determined to sell it to a local Anchorage art gallery. I figured to ask about a thousand for it, plenty for me and with enough slack to allow the gallery a good profit. I thought I probably wouldn't tell them the whole story. Who'd believe it anyway?

After I had docked and tied the Cessna down for the night, though, I couldn't find the basket anywhere. Not on the seat where I had left it, not under the seat where I thought it might have rolled—nowhere.

What I did find, after closer examination in the failing light, was another hair-raiser. Where I had placed the basket earlier there was now a small pile of greenish dust. In the midst of this dust was the small horn tip

which had once been the latch.

It took another eighteen months or so to uncover the mystery surrounding that small basket of ashes and my young passenger. It seems that John had murdered one of his village elders in a drunken rage. Chopped him into pieces with a rusty old double-bit axe. A group of villagers had found John sleeping it off early the next morning in the bottom of his skiff. A trial was quickly held, as is usual in such village matters. Young John, not completely without honor, admitted his indiscretion, and the elders ultimately passed sentence on him.

The victim, a highly respected hunter and provider, was to be cremated in a stone house. John was to accompany the cremated remains to Two Person Lake. For such a trip, according to custom, always required two persons: the victim and the perpetrator.

As I've said, I've made several of those flights through the years. On a small shelf in my office stands a collection of eleven small bone latches. Reminders of those flights, which are always the same. The weather, the lake, the spaced-out passenger, and the basket.

And another horn tip for the shelf.

I'll never get used to it, but it no longer frightens the wits out of me. The pay is good, somebody's gotta do it—and I've come to see the justice of it all.

Sometimes I forget about Two Person Lake for months or even years. Until days like today . . .

"Hello—Whitmore."

"Marc? It's Kathy at Anchorage Radio. Got a patch for you from Egegik."

"Don't clap, Kathy. Throw money."

"Okay, I'll patch 'em through. Hang on a minute. It's fading, though. Comes and goes. You know good weather and radio signals."

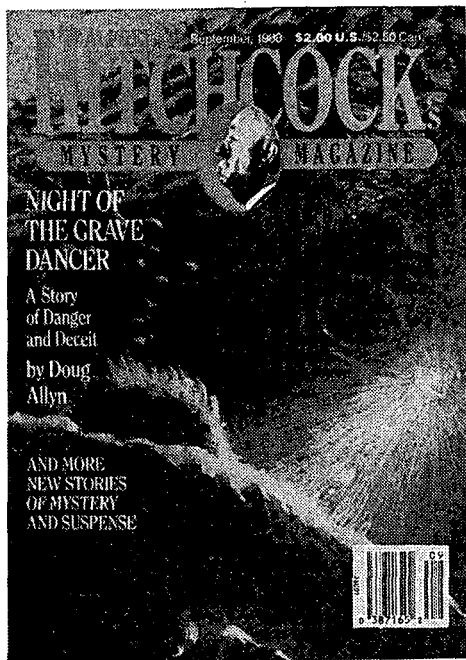
"Yep. I'll hold."

I leaned back in my chair and looked up—just in time to see one of the caribou horn tip latches fall over with a small "click." The hair on the back of my spine came up and a frigid chill slid down my spine. The office suddenly felt cold.

Kathy came back and said, "Get that, Marc?"

"Huh-uh. Didn't hear a thing."

"Okay, I'll relay it," Kathy said. "KBJ 44 Egegik, stand by. Marc, it's some guy wants to know—do you know Two Person Lake?"



SOME PEOPLE WOULD KILL

FOR A COPY.

**SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO
29% OFF THE COVER PRICE**

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)

**YES SEND ME 12 ISSUES
FOR ONLY \$16.97**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____



P.O. Box 1932, Marion, OH 43306

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery
of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions
\$19.97 for 12 issues. All foreign orders
must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

DHK8H-9

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Twin Confusion



by Steve Barancik

In the private eye business, I'm finding out, everything comes down to who you know, because referrals are the name of the game. You have to know cops because that's how you get the "My-ex-took-the-kids-and-fled-for-Topeka" busi-

ness—you know, milk carton stuff. And you have to know bartenders if you want the "My-cheatin'-wife-and-that-no-good-son-of-a-witch" stuff. Cops and bartenders. All *my* friends sell insurance.

Still, a man wants to work for

himself, and of all fifty states this one happens to have the easiest licensing requirements for P.I.'s. You don't even need an office, just a place of residence. And, I figured, an ad in the Yellow Pages. *A Nice Guy, P.I.*, under *Private Investigations*. I thought it had a ring to it. Besides, starting with "A," it lands at the top of the listings.

Still, three weeks after the ad came out all I'd received was a series of calls that responded to my greeting—"A Nice Guy, P.I., your private and personal eye in the sky"—with an equally pleasant, "Oops, wrong number." My ad, it seems, attracted a somewhat reluctant clientele. But on this particular day the caller was of a gutsier sort.

"Mr. Guy?" she queried, a probable bluehair.

"Yes," I answered, not wanting to confuse her. You see, most people insist on calling me "Dairy." I'd prefer my real name, but compared to Dairy, even "Mr. Guy" is an improvement. "And who am I speaking to?"

"Ethel Peters," she answered. "I think."

It seemed she was confused enough already. "What can I do for you, Ms. Peters?"

"We have a problem we don't know how to solve, Mr. Guy, and we're hoping you could help us. Could we come in and see you?"

I gave her the directions, hung up the phone, and began stuffing most of my apartment, and much of my breakfast, under the bed.

There was a knock. (What'd you expect? Chimes?) "Come in," I called. I was sitting at the foot of my twin bed, behind my new, ratty old desk, facing the door, which opened slowly. A little old lady head poked through—just the head. Little old lady eyes, behind little old lady glasses, over a little old lady smile. Just what a little old lady *should* look like. "Mr. Guy? I'm Ethel Peters." I would have understood if God had skimped on the variety and simply made them all look like this. Just then, another head poked through the crack, right below the first head and absolutely identical to it. Geez, I thought, He's already started. I shut my eyes to refocus, and when I opened them the second head spoke, saying, "And I'm Berniece Johnson. I think."

Satisfied that there were indeed two of them, minimum, I invited them in. If they objected to the beanbag chairs they didn't say anything. "Now what can I do for you ladies?" I asked.

One looked at the other, and the other looked back; then one of them spoke. "You see, Mr. Guy, Ethel and I, I mean my sister and I, we were talking

recently and found we'd both had the same nagging doubt for years."

The other sister continued as soon as the first took a breath. I couldn't even tell their voices apart. "When we were children we were very well behaved. We never played the little tricks that most twins do."

"What kind of tricks?" I asked. If I was a detective, I thought, I should probably be asking questions. I should probably buy a notebook and pen, too.

"Tricks such as switching identities," said the woman. "We hardly ever did that."

"Almost never," confirmed the other woman, emphasizing the "never" as if I might send her to bed without supper.

"Well, once we did," said the one on the left as they continued to alternate. "And that's the problem. We both remember trading names and places for a very long time, but neither of us actually remembers switching back."

"You mean . . . ?" I deduced.

They nodded their little old lady heads and spoke, in unison. "We think we might be each other."

I leaned back in my chair, then jerked forward, remembering it was a bed. I thought of my Uncle Herman, who, at an advanced age, had confused memory with reality and thought himself his boyhood

hero, Ty Cobb. If Uncle Herman weren't so dead I could have fixed him up with these two.

With so little to think about, they'd managed to convince themselves that they might be the other. I considered telling the both of them that they were exactly who they thought they had been for the last sixty years, just minus a few brain cells, and shooing them on their way. But then I realized that that wouldn't be real good for business.

"Ladies," I said, "this sounds like a very tough case. But luckily for you I solved my last case—" The Case of the Lost Comb, I found it in the dishwasher—"a couple of days early and I have some spare time to help you." I quoted them my price, and they insisted on paying me in advance. Wishing I had quoted them double, I resolved to run up a very serious expense account.

I stepped out from behind my desk to help them up and see them to the door. I told them I'd be contacting them later that day with some specific questions. (After I'd bought writing materials.) Before they walked out the door, I asked them why it was so important to know for sure their real identities.

The twins looked at each other, and the one on my left spoke. "We're very religious," she said, "and we're getting on

in years. It's important to us that we be laid to rest with our real baptismal names."

I nodded understandingly with, I like to think, the exact amount of solemnity the comment called for. Then I sent them on their way. As they walked down the hallway, helping each other over the garbage, I watched. Heck, I even smiled. They reminded me some of my grandmothers.

Having returned from the corner drugstore with my writables, I sat down and tried to think like a private detective. I needed documentation that would prove which lady was which. My first thought was fingerprints, but somehow I couldn't see either lady's having been arrested all that often. Still, I made a note to check police records. Hospitals, I remembered from an old Dick Van Dyke show, take footprints of babies upon birth. That was probably the answer, ask the ladies what hospital they were born in, get the records, and I would probably have my proof. Provided identical twins have different prints. But what if they didn't?

I wrote down some other questions that I figured could end up being relevant. At least they sounded relevant. Like at what age they thought they'd done their final switch of identities.

And whether either of them had a distinguishing birthmark that the other did not. Had either one had a childhood disease that the other had not? Had they ever been separated for a significant amount of time? And was there anyone who knew them well during their childhood, friend or relative, who hadn't kicked the big bucket yet? I put an asterisk by that one so that, while speaking to the ladies, I would remember to phrase the question more sensitively, if possible. I rang them up.

"Hello?" answered one of them.

"Mrs. Waters?" I guessed.

"Very possibly," she answered. "Oh, Mr. Guy! Let me get my sister on the extension."

Three minutes of total confusion ensued, but eventually they were both on the line.

"Ladies," I said, "I have some questions for you." I wrote down the answers, which went like this. Neither of them had ever been arrested, though they'd tried to have a man locked up for smoking in a "No Smoking" section once. They had been born at St. Jude's Hospital, right here in town, and their maiden name was McCarthy. They couldn't decide on exactly when they had last switched identities, but they determined it had been between the ages of eleven and thirteen. Giggling

in tandem, they answered that while they both had a number of distinguishing birthmarks, there were none that distinguished them from each other. They didn't remember any childhood diseases that hadn't kept both of them from school, and they didn't remember doing anything separately until their dating years. And no, they were the most long-lived among their friends and relatives.

Before I hung up, one more thought occurred to me. "While I go to work on what you've told me, ladies, see if you can come up with any childhood memories that the other doesn't have. Can you do that for me?"

"Of course, Mr. Guy," they said together. I simply didn't have the heart to tell them that my name wasn't Guy.

Next day, the first thing I did was drive over to St. Jude's. What I found out was that babies weren't footprinted back then. The twins' birth certificates were identical, save for their names and the Doctor's Comment on Ethel's, which read, "Let's say this one came first."

Since they had lived their whole lives here, my next stop was at the county clerk's. I found records of their respective marriages (both husbands had since died) and of their both receiving their driver's licenses

on the same day some fifty-five years earlier.

I tracked down their childhood medical records, hoping to find something that only one of the women would remember. Both girls had had chicken pox at the age of eight, well before their change of identities. Ethel had contracted the disease a week before Berniece. I left the doctor's office and called the women.

"Hello," one of them answered. "This is Ethel or Berniece."

Yeah, I laughed. You'd have laughed, too. "Mr. Guy here," I said. "Could you get Berniece or Ethel on the line, too?" I waited while Berniece or Ethel got on, then while Ethel or Berniece scurried back to the first phone.

"Ladies," I said, "when you were eight you both came down with chicken pox. Do you remember that?"

They both said they did.

"You contracted it one week apart. Do you happen to remember who gave it to whom?"

"Oh, yes," said one of the ladies. "She gave it to me."

I grinned triumphantly, regretting only that the ladies probably wouldn't be a very fertile source of referrals.

"No, I didn't. You gave it to me."

"No, I distinctly remem—"

Crestfallen, I broke in, not

wanting to hear any more. "Were you ladies able to come up with any separate childhood memories, as I asked?"

"Nothing," they answered.

"Okay, then," I said, attempting to continue sounding confident, "I'll be in touch." Even after I hung up I thought I could still hear the women arguing over who gave the chicken pox to whom.

I was ready to give up. Despite the prepayment, having my first assignment end up in the win column would have been nice, I thought to myself. Maybe, I thought, there's a book in the library on how to be a private detective. I could certainly use one. Or maybe if I just did some more digging, learned some more about the identical oldsters, something would make itself apparent. My second wind kicking in thus, I checked out municipal and state records sources, without much luck. I drove around the ladies' old neighborhood, hoping, I guess, for an idea to leap in front of my car. None did.

I was getting ready to head back home when it occurred to me. I detoured to police headquarters. Was there any record of the women's parents, either of them, encountering the law—even a speeding ticket? Yes, said the police, there was a record of the father's car getting towed some sixty-eight

years ago. The girls would have been ten; the time was perfect. Hoping that only one of the girls would have been with Dad at the time, I sped right over to the twins' apartment. I really believed I was going to, um, crack the case. Or whatever phrase it is us private detectives use to express success.

Both ladies opened the door. "Mr. Guy," they sang. "Come in."

They offered me a cup of tea. I passed. I was so excited I would have nixed a steak dinner. I sat them down and asked which was which. The one on my left had called herself Berniece for most of the last century. The one on my right, Ethel.

"Does either of you ladies remember, at the age of ten, when your father had his car towed from in front of Hinton's Hardware?"

"Yes," exclaimed the woman on my left.

"No," said the one on the right.

Bingo! I turned to face the first one directly. "Tell me what happened." I wanted to take her back in time some seventy years.

"I was standing by the window when the policeman drove up. He came in and asked who owned the car in front of the fire hydrant. My daddy was in the back of the store getting some paint mixed, so he didn't hear.

Next thing you know the car was getting pulled away. Daddy came back out, saw the car missing, and was sure someone had stolen it. Then I told him what happened. When he realized I'd seen the whole thing and hadn't said anything, boy did he cuss me out."

I tried to shoot the key question at her while she was still walking Memory Lane. "What name did your daddy call you?"

"Ethel!" shouted the lady.

I grinned like an idiot.

"Or was it Berniece?"

Then I *felt* like an idiot.

I'd given it my best shot, but there was nothing left in me. My conscience was saying, "Refund," while my brain was thinking, "Partial," when all of a sudden the twin who had been with her father when the car was towed went scurrying off towards the bathroom, holding her mouth. I'd really begun to like these ladies. I sort of hoped that the one in the bathroom wasn't having a heart attack. I verbalized this to the other.

"Oh, no," she said. "We just got new sets of dentures. I think when she got so excited she just about yelled them loose."

My brain clicked, audibly it seemed, judging by the lady's reaction.

"I think I know what you're thinking," she said. "But it won't work. They didn't take X-rays in those days. And besides, we're

so identical that we're each missing nineteen teeth, and those in the exact same places."

"Who's your dentist?"

"Dr. Pongratz, but we've only been going to him for five years."

"I'll be back within an hour," I called behind me.

Pongratz's office, of course, had the twins' records dating back to their first dentist. I charmed the receptionist, then, when that didn't work, slipped her a twenty. She gave me the records under the condition that I read them in the restroom and leave my wallet for collateral. I guess I have an honest face. The restroom key, of course, was attached to a plastic dinosaur molar.

I locked the stall door and pulled Ethel's records out of the folder. The sisters, bless 'em, had started dropping their pearly whites at age nine. I put Berniece's records on my left knee and Ethel's on my right. With my pen I divided the top sheet of toilet paper into two parts. At the top on the left half I put a "B," at the top of the right an "A." I started counting extractions, making a slash for each one in the appropriate toilet paper column.

Doggone if this wasn't more exciting than deciding which pair of underwear to wear twice. I checked my numbers. Total slashes: Thirty-eight. Final

score: Berniece twenty, Ethel eighteen. The twins *had* switched identities! I tracked down the errant tooth. Berniece, according to the records but unnoticed by the dentist, had had the same tooth extracted at age sixteen, at least three years after the switch, that she'd had removed at age ten, at least one year before. The ages fit. They *hadn't* switched back. They weren't senile seniors. They certainly had been extremely dense teenagers, though.

I returned the records and got my wallet back, despite striking out with the receptionist. Don't believe everything you've heard about private eyes and women. I raced over to Berniece and Ethel's. Make that Ethel and Berniece's.

There's no high, I've found out, like that of cracking a case. And there's no need like the one to tell the concerned party how you did it. In my dreams I'd always imagined the concerned party as tall and blonde with legs up to here. In this case, however, the twins were the ones who'd paid and would have to suffice. They opened the door before I even knocked, and before I could say anything they'd said, "Don't tell us."

"Huh?"

"Don't tell us." They may have been sweet little old la-

dies, but I got the distinct impression they would slam the door on my face if I tried to blurt out the answer they had paid so willingly for. "Just nod yes or no," said one of them, the one who called herself Berniece but would spend the rest of her life as Ethel, "whether you figured out the answer."

I nodded yes.

"You probably want to know why we don't want to know."

I nodded again.

"Remember we said we were very religious?"

Nod.

"Well, imagine if we found out we had never switched back. When we got to the Great Beyond—what a mess! We'd have to tell each of our husbands that they were actually married to the other. Surely you can understand the shame of it."

Nod.

"Have a nice day, Mr. Guy," they sang out together, shutting the door.

I must have stood there, in shock, for a full minute. "The name," I muttered, finally turning away, "is Mr. Queen. Darrell Queen."

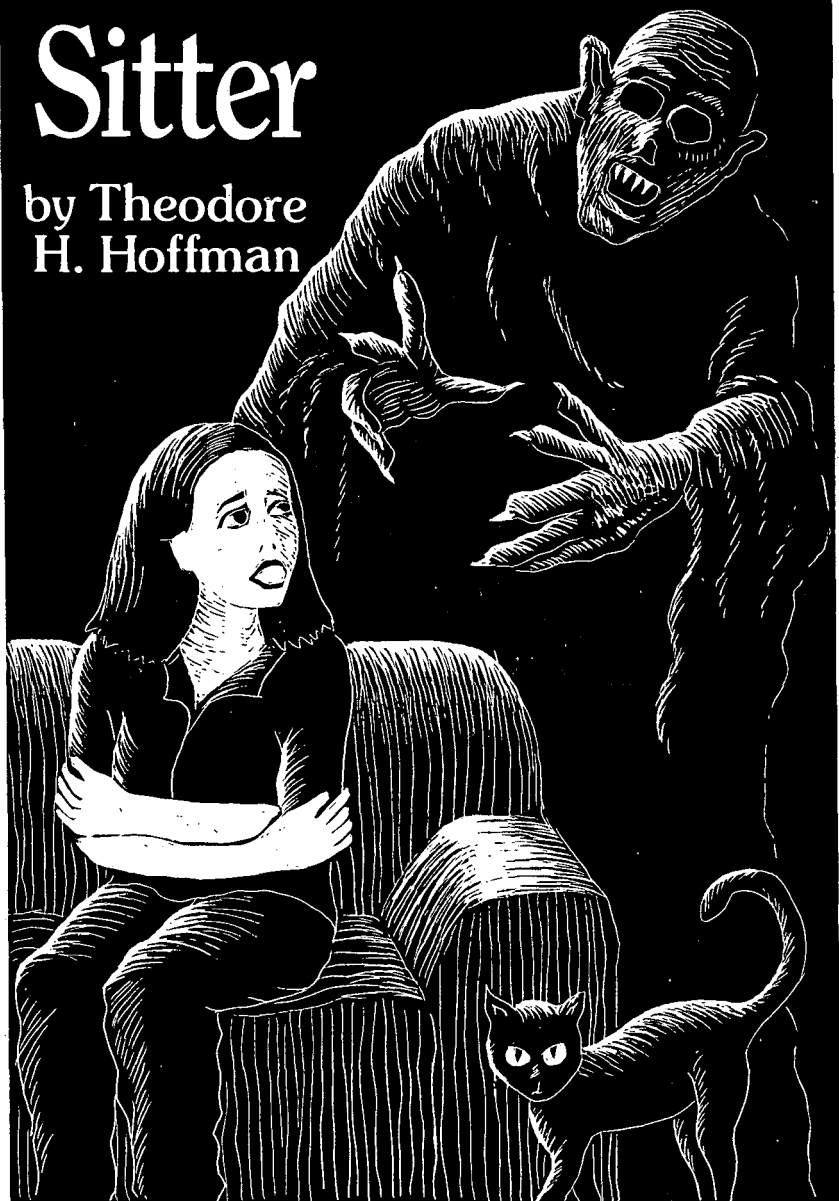
I had noticed a bar right down the street. Striking off in that direction, I convinced myself I would be looking for referrals. You know, bartenders and all that.

Yeah, right.

FICTION

Sitter

by Theodore
H. Hoffman



It's shortly after you've checked on the kids again that you hear the first noise.

You're sitting on the couch, sipping Diet Coke. Their Diet Coke; it tastes funny, somehow. Minutes ago you'd tiptoed up the stairs, peering in on the kids, hoping the light from the hallway wouldn't disturb them. Even in such dim light you could see the bruise on little Brian's cheek. A fall, Mrs. Redgrave ("Oh, please call me Cam!") had said. But you'd watched the way Brian had held back from his parents, clinging to Samantha. None of the standard histrionics (hooray for vocabulary tests), the tears and the "don't go's." It had seemed like shyness, normal in kids when around strangers. Now, you realize it had been fear. Fear of Mr. Redgrave, mostly, with his marble eyes and too-moist grin. A man who wanted things his way, and was willing to use force to get them. Yes: You can see it now in your mind's eye, more clearly than when it happened, when they walked out the door ("We'll be back by eleven! Take care of our babies!") and climbed into the BMW (of course) and zipped off to their little party. Then, you had been pleased that Mrs.—Cam—had not gone through that little speech the other mothers all did, "the emergency numbers are right next to the phone" (with that distant look of suspicion in their eyes). You'd thought that meant she trusted you. Now, you understand it meant she didn't care.

The kids were terrific, just as Nance had said. Quiet kids. The kind you want to have someday. Not like some of the brats you've sat for (usually just once), not weird like in the movies where they crawl out of your womb with bloody claws and hate in their oversized brains. . . .

They'd gone to bed right when they were supposed to. You tucked them in carefully, humming to them. At five and two and a half, so pure, so simple. So helpless. You'd asked Brian about that bruise, and he hesitated only a moment before echoing his mother's story about The Fall in the Front Yard. But hesitated nonetheless. What did he have to be afraid of, you'd wondered; and then Mr. Redgrave rose in your mind's eye like a vampire at dusk.

And now you've heard a noise.

—)scruff(—

Frozen, holding your breath, can of soda angled so near your lips, you strain to listen. (DDDUUUhhhhnnnn . . . swells the trembling pipe organ in your head.) Nothing; even the silence is quiet, for once. You let out your breath, and wonder if you should have a look around. Check on the kids. ("Why don't you check the chil-

dren," and there's Carol Kane, getting the phone call from the police telling her that those murderous, obscene phone calls have been coming from *inside the house* and the door to the kids' room is creaking open and)

(STOP IT.)

Silence. You sit back. Smiling. You're not going to be like the girls in those stupid movies, going to investigate every sound, usually with (HA) a stupid candle, and the psycho whose escape from the nuthouse you'd heard about on the radio (never never play the radio or TV while babysitting, too much chance you'll hear or see something unpleasant, stick to the cassettes, Barry Manilow and Bon Jovi), the psycho is waiting around the corner with nail clippers, waiting to do ungodly things to you. . . . Then again, there are the fools in the war movies, the sentries who hear something and shrug and go back to their card game, and wind up with an extra mouth gaping between their eyes. . . .

Damn it. (Why do you do this, why do you do this every stupid time?)

You get up. Pace. It's a lovely house, big and soft and bright. (Jack Nicholson could get lost in here, too) (now STOP it.) You listen to your breathing, settle it down, grip the can more tightly. Walk over to the photos on the fireplace mantel. Yup: the Grand Canyon (Hello! you mouth to the frozen family waving to you, Cam cradling little Brian as though to pitch him over the side). Niagara Falls (why do parents let their kids so near the rails? You can see the headlines—*deadlines*, that voice inside your head says—"KID FALLS TO WATERY DEATH AS STUPID PARENTS

—)click(—

—now what *was* that.

You listen, stock-still, and the silence seems to be whispering now, but your mind tries to comfort you: Hey. Houses, even new ones, settle at night. Calm down. They have a cat, remember? You haven't seen it since you put the kids to bed, and it hasn't come near you, it's scared, remember? The doors and windows are locked. You've checked. Calm down.

You let out your breath. You feel it empty from your lungs, inflate your cheeks, rush over your lips; and you do it again just to replay the feeling. There's something reassuring about it. (Yeah—the dead can't breathe) (oh now just STOP it!)

Quiet.

Quiet.

(TOO quiet, your mind says, and you think SHUT UP! and your

mind does, angrily and reluctantly.) You realize you are in a vulnerable position. They could come from so many directions. From the hallway to your left. From behind the wall obscuring most of the foyer, which leads to the kitchen. (Is that where the sounds are coming from? The kitchen?) (... knives ...) (TOLD YOU TO SHUT UP!) From the window behind you, with that flimsy lock you keep checking. From the fireplace. (THE SANTA CLAUS MURDERS, the deadline screams, and they get Jamie Lee Curtis to play you in the movie and it's called *Santa Claws*, and at the climax there's a slayride, and there's Jamie Lee on the living room floor with her face sheared off and the blood isn't pouring or spurt-ing my God it's *bubbling* like when you blow through a straw into a strawberry shake, and out in the woods the masked killer is cupping your face in his hands and it's still alive, your eyes blinking and your mouth trying to form words, and he's leaning to kiss you with his leathery wet lips and his tongue curls inside your mouth, licking his palms, and HIS EYES ARE MR. REDGRAVE'S) and there's a pounding, someone at the door? behind the wall? upstairs in the kids' bedroom (oh my God not there, anywhere but there) . . . ? And you whirl around before you realize the pounding is your heart, just seventeen years old and trying to work itself into a coronary (like Daddy's and) (damn it) (*he lived*). . . .

—)Scruff(.

You hear it. It's not like the other times, the other houses. You *know* you hear it. You still don't know what it is—your mind's not even goading you with guesses any more—but it is a noise and it seems to be coming from the kitchen and it is caused by something. *Something*. (Or some *thing*, that voice adds, smiling wickedly, but you expected it to say that) and you shake your head and, aloud, say, "No."

The sound is swallowed by the house, tasted, passed quickly from corner to corner, room to room, chair to rug to banister to front door. "No." You hear it whispered hungrily around you; and you know you do not hear it, and you listen until it fades away.

In that eye of stillness, you do what you always do, what you must do. You devise escape routes. Contingencies; that's what they're called in those war movies. You consider every scenario (now where'd you get *that* word?) and work out an escape. If they come through that window—and you edge over to check the lock again; yes—then you'll LEAP OVER THE SOFA, FLINGING THE LAMP BEHIND YOU WITH YOUR LEFT ARM, AND HEAD FOR THE STAIRS, GRABBING THE VASE AS YOU RUN, YELLING

BLOODY MURDER (oh *Jesus* what a stupid phrase), YELLING LIKE MAD AS YOU RUN, READY TO DO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO DO TO SAVE THE CHILDREN. . . .

And you feel better as you stand there, working out escape routes. Refusing to hear any more noises. You roll your shoulders, flex your fingers, stretch. Not much longer now. The Redgraves, whatever their other problems, are a prompt couple; that's what Nance told you, anyway.

But then you'd probably have taken the job no matter what she told you (like about Mr. Redgrave's eyes and lips). Because you've missed it. Babysitting. After that last time, word had gotten around, and none of the mothers would call you any more. That bothers you, how mothers can be so stupid, that they can't see how you'd give your life to protect their kids (something your parents would never do). Anything you'd done was done with their precious little children in mind—most of them brats anyway. Not like these kids, Brian and Samantha. They're so . . . vulnerable. And having to grow up with that ugly name. Redgrave—sounds like where Communist vampires come from. (Mr. Redgrave rises in your mind again, teeth bared now.) These lousy parents couldn't even get their *name* right.

Or their house. You hug yourself, looking around slowly. Too big, too empty. Why don't they have an alarm system? This may be a nice neighborhood, not much riffraff (now you're talking like Daddy); but still, this is the kind of place you'd think the really good burglars would try to hit, especially on such a big lot, fenced in so the neighbors can't see in (JESUS WHY DO YOU DO THIS TO YOURSELF EVERY, SINGLE, TIME). You are getting mad. Less and less at that stupid voice in your head, more and more at the Redgraves. Running off to their little social functions, leaving these sweet kids with strangers and bruises. (Nance has already sat for these people *six times* since they moved in. And she may be a terrific friend—she got you this job, didn't she?—but you *know* she doesn't care about the kids as much as you do. She wouldn't put her life on the line for them. She can't even keep her eyes open for half of the best moments in the horror movies you take her to!) You smile, and wonder if there is a gun in the house—

)Click(.

—and your nerves are shrieking again, your mind racing (what the hell is that what the hell *is* that!). "Scruff click?" What makes a noise like that, you wonder, backing from the entrance leading to the kitchen, where the sounds are definitely coming from. What?

Maybe the cat eating from a dish? One of the kids sneaking a midnight snack? (Oh God is it really that late?—No, no, just ten forty-five, hold on, hold on, they'll be back by no later than eleven, that's what Cam said, "no later than eleven," that's what she promised. . . .) Maybe the refrigerator coming on? Maybe a hooded strangler easing the window open with blood-bloated eyes (Mr. Redgrave's eyes) and piano wire in his raw meaty hands and (STOP THIS RIGHT NOW!)

. . . and you realize you are pacing the room, choking a pillow from the couch, walking dangerously near those entranceways. . . . You take an angry breath, and you turn as though to march right into that kitchen and prove to yourself that it's just happening again (memories flare in your mind like those flashing lights on the police cars), you're overreacting to your stupid imagination, just like Daddy says, you're being silly, inventing murderers and monsters, probably inventing the noises—

)Scruft click(.

—no you're not.

The phone. You back to it, trying to swallow, ready to throw the pillow and go for the andirons or whatever the hell you call those fireplace pole things—

And suddenly you see yourself in your mind. It's like a movie. The way the sounds come just at the most quiet moments. The way the house is set behind dark fences. The stairs (*Psycho* . . .). The kids ("Why don't you check the children," and was his name really Brian or was it Damian, is she really Baby Jane . . .?) (JUST SHUT UP!) No alarms. No emergency numbers. Redgraves. Red. Graves. Eyes and lips. Bruises.

You reach for the pole (poker, a poker, that's what it's called, CALM DOWN), and it feels oh so solid in your hand; yet it accelerates your fear, because holding it means you're serious, you really think there's somebody in the house and you've really got a weapon in your hand and you've really, finally, got to protect the children. . . .

)Scrick(.

Your free hand wavers over the phone. You *can't* call the police. What if it is (but you KNOW it's not) another false alarm? You can't stand the thought of everyone looking at you again, like they're scared of you; or making fun of you like those creeps in school. More lectures from Daddy, even Nance acting different around you . . .

No. Hold on. "No later than eleven," and that means she thinks

they'll probably get home BEFORE then, and it's nearly eleven now, and there's just not enough time for someone to be stabbed strangled butchered (SHUT UP) raped burned (PLEASE SHUT UP!). . . .

Nance. She's home. (Thank God for grounding! Bless you, Mr. Piper, you jerk!) And you pick up the receiver and start dialing, awkwardly holding the poker with your little finger against your palm

—)SCRUFF(—

and ignoring the noises

—)CLICK(—

and when the cat runs in, an orange blur, you can't help it you SCREAM and Jamie Lee Curtis could *never* duplicate that, and the damn cat changes its mind and heads right on back out of there!

And it's all so silly and stupid that yes, you laugh, just the way the script would say to do; and you look at the poker you've somehow held onto and you feel—moronic, a scared little schoolgirl (and hoping you didn't wake the kids). You toss the poker onto the plush rug the way the girl always does in the movies, and it lands so softly, as softly as the footstep behind you as the hand that covers your mouth as the hand that wraps around the phone receiver warm and hairy, and almost as softly as the chillingly familiar voice that says, "That's a good girl," then stays quiet no matter what those terrible hands are doing. . . .

. . . except . . .

Except:

Before any of that can happen you get your hand around the back of his head (my God his breath in your ear is so *hot*) and you grab a handful of mask and the hair beneath it and YANK and somehow he's flying over your shoulder, you hear him gasp and his painful grip is gone; and before he can even land you're leaping over the couch, flinging the lamp behind you with your left arm, and heading for the stairs, grabbing the vase as you run; and you are about to scream because you hear him thundering up behind you, thundering through the plush silence of the rug with certain murder in his eyes (oh how you know those eyes) but he's got to get by you to get at the children so you raise the vase and turn to brain him . . .

No one.

You let your breath run wild and glance around madly (where is he where *is* he); and you jerk around because maybe somehow

he got on the stairs above you, but no one—
—and somehow it's worse, not being able to see him, not knowing where he is (even though you know WHO he is), waiting for him to JUMP OUT AT YOU KNIFE RAISED TEETH BARED and chills and shivers rack you, you stab out a hand to turn on the lamp next to the stairs, and the light chases the shadows; and you feel a stirring of triumph, because he can't get you in the light; these psychos they need the darkness, and you skitter through the room, vase at the ready, and turn on every light you can!

And you catch your breath. Your thoughts. Survey the situation. Form your escape routes. And somehow you know he is going to try to do the unexpected; going to try to get at you through the least likely way.

The front door. (The last thing you'd ever suspect.) (HA!)

You gather what's left of your courage and let it propel you into the living room again, to the poker. It seems to jump into your hand. You toss the vase onto the couch (so quietly it bounces . . .).

You're ready.

A calm fills you. A sense of confidence. Of justice. You take your place behind the front door, away from the window (locked? yes) that would give you away. The poker is firm in your grasp. You're *not* going to be like one of those girls in the movies. You're *prepared*. Your escape routes are *planned*. You glance at the stairs—how the psycho would get at those lovely kids. You won't let that happen. They're going to make it. So are you. As the glare of headlights cuts through the window, you steady yourself, and raise the poker.

—And in the breathless silence, there is another voice.

The voice you have heard so many times before, at moments like this. A calm voice, soothing yet insistent. The poker wavers.

(No. Not yet. Not here. Not them.)

Distantly, you hear a car door slam. Light laughter.

(Yes. The poker down. Softly, hurry. Back in its place. Yes.)

The muffled rhythm of shoes on a driveway.

(Quickly. Lights, off. The vase. Good. The lamp. Yes. Everything is all right. Remember always your ultimate escape route: the appearance of normality. Never let them know what happens behind these eyes.)

The rustle of a key, struggling to fill a lock.

(The time will come. Patience.)

You are sitting on the sofa, finishing the Diet Coke when the door opens. You look up, and smile. Cam smiles back. So does Mr.

Redgrave. And you see how much, in this light, he looks like Daddy.

"Well! Here we are, right on time! Everything go okay? Samantha or Brian give you any trouble?" Cam asks, handing her wrap to Mr. Redgrave, looking around the room.

"Not a bit," you say, standing. Walking toward them, over that mute rug. "Straight to bed, and right on time. They're lovely children—Cam."

She smiles, lightly squeezes your shoulder. "Well, thank you. And from what I can see, Nancy was right: You are a very sweet and dependable young woman. Don't you think, David?"

"Looks that way," he says, and looms over you for a moment. "Looks as though you've certainly earned your money. Cam and I are grateful. Well, suppose I should get you home. Got everything?"

(Yes.)

As you get your purse, you wonder if you should ask to see the children one more time, to make sure they are okay. Their faces dance in your mind briefly (like sugarplums), and you glance around to make sure the shadows hiding at the corners of the room are empty.

"Ready," you say.

(Yes . . .)

Cam waves. "We'll let you know when we need you again, honey—

(. . . soon . . .)

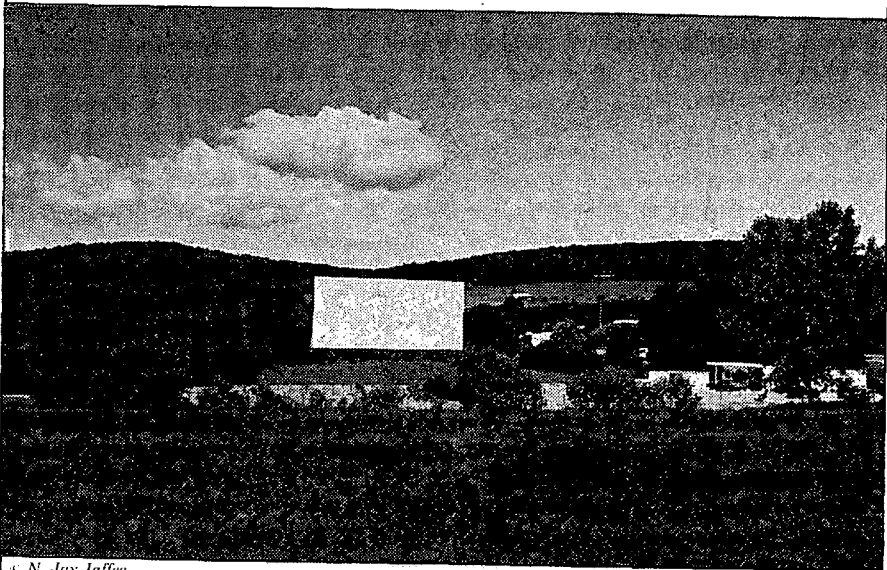
—and, really, thank you again. You'll hear from us soon. I'm afraid poor Nancy may have talked herself out of a job!"

(. . . YES . . .)

You follow him to the car. He even opens the door for you. As you sit back in the soft seat, he says, "There's a concert next week Cam and I were planning to attend. Are you doing anything Wednesday night?"

You close your eyes. Smile. "Not a thing." And you wait for the screen to fade to black.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



© N. Jay Jaffee

The old moving finger could have a field day here. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the May Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

The Dressing Table Murder

by C. M. Chan



Illustration by Patrick Welsh

LICENSED 580 UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

“Come to lunch, Jack,” said Philip Bethancourt.

Detective Sergeant Jack Gibbons cradled the phone against his shoulder and cast a cautious glance at the clock on the nightstand. The hands pointed to eleven thirty and he lay back on his pillows with a sigh.

“When?” he asked suspiciously.

A note of amusement crept into Bethancourt’s voice. “Why, Jack,” he said, “did you tie one on last night? You sound a bit foggy.”

“I am a bit foggy,” admitted Gibbons. “In fact, you woke me up.”

“Well, rise and shine. It’s a beautiful, sunny Sunday—probably the last we’ll have, and it’s no good wasting it in bed. Marla and I have planned lunch in Kew Gardens. She’s got one of her model friends coming along, and we want to make it a foursome. We’ll pick you up in half an hour.”

Gibbons thought that the sun, while undoubtedly bright, would hardly be warming enough for a trip to the Gardens and said so.

“Nonsense,” replied Bethancourt. “I tell you, we’re having a heat wave. We’ll be round at twelve.”

Gibbons started to protest and found himself doing so to

a dial tone. Cursing, he peeled back the covers and made for the bathroom.

In half an hour, he had showered, shaved, and drunk two cups of coffee. He was not yet dressed, but that hardly mattered. Phillip Bethancourt was never on time for anything and when accompanied by his girlfriend, Marla Tate, he was always twice as late as usual. Marla, one of the top fashion models in England, was punctual at work, but that seemed to put such a strain on her that she found it impossible to be punctual for anything else. What Gibbons, who was never late himself, couldn’t understand was why they were always later when together.

Thus, he was not really surprised to hear the phone ring at twelve fifteen, heralding, he supposed, an announcement of a further delayed arrival.

This, however, was not the case. The voice at the other end was not the voice of Bethancourt but the voice of Scotland Yard, reminding him that he was on call.

Mrs. Delia MacGruder had been murdered. Under suspicious circumstances. Would Detective Gibbons please go over to her townhouse immediately.

Gibbons sighed and said he would.

In ten more minutes, the

doorbell rang and Gibbons opened the door to admit a young man unremarkable in appearance. He was a little over average height, fairish and slender, with good, if somewhat delicate, features and mischievously bright eyes behind tortoiseshell glasses. He was accompanied and utterly eclipsed by a tall, slender woman with an abundance of copper-colored hair, flawless, creamy skin, and a face of undeniable beauty. High cheekbones slanted down to full, rosy lips, the nose was straight and fine, and above all reigned enormous jade-green eyes.

Behind them followed by far the most dignified member of the party: a large Russian wolfhound.

"I'm sorry," said Gibbons. "I tried to call, but you'd already left. I can't go."

"Not even," said Marla, smiling enticingly, "to meet Janet?"

Gibbons shook his head. "I'm afraid not. The Yard called and I have to go look at a murder. Wealthy woman apparently poisoned in her townhouse. It's a bloody nuisance."

"It sounds rather interesting," said Bethancourt, who was an amateur sleuth. "Who was it?"

"Delia MacGruder."

"Don't know her." He shook his head regretfully. "Still, it

sounds intriguing. Look, we'll run you over there—"

"Phillip," said Marla sharply "we still have to pick Janet up."

"Damn, that's right. Look here, darling, you take the car and get Janet and go on ahead. Jack and I will take a cab and meet you as soon as we're done."

Marla's look was frosty. "You can't just cancel on lunch like that."

"But I'm not cancelling. Marla, I'm merely running a little late. Now you go ahead and Jack and I will catch you up in no time. Here are the keys. Come, we'll all go down together."

Marla, splendidly arctic in her anger, stalked from the flat. Downstairs, she gave Bethancourt a look that boded him no good when she did see him again, climbed into the grey Jaguar, and drove off at something approaching the speed of light.

"My," said Gibbons, who never failed to be impressed by Marla's fits of temper. Then, "She's left you with the dog."

"That's all right," said Bethancourt. "Cerberus is quite well trained. He'll wait outside for us. Come on, let's find a cab."

Bethancourt and Gibbons had been at Oxford together, where they had had a nodding ac

quaintance, but a chance meeting in a London pub a year or two after they had come down was the real basis of their friendship. On a typical raw November night they had come across each other, Bethancourt gloomy over a girl who had just shown him the door, Gibbons even gloomier over a difficult murder case at the Yard. His superiors could make nothing of it and as a result were pressing their subordinate, who could make nothing of it either and who was the more distressed as he felt that this was his opportunity to distinguish himself. Over the whiskies, Bethancourt found himself forgetting about girls as he became fascinated by the tangled threads of the case, which seemed, on the face of it, almost impossible to unravel. Gibbons, for his part, discovered it made his own ideas clearer to talk the thing out with someone divorced from the Yard. The next day Bethancourt rang Gibbons, deprecatingly putting out a few thoughts which Gibbons found very illuminating indeed. It was not long before the case was solved and Gibbons was promoted to detective sergeant on the strength of it. The celebration attendant on this glorious event had cemented their friendship, and the whole episode had given Bethancourt a new hobby.

So they came now to the scene of this latest crime without having to explain Bethancourt's presence and without Gibbons' having to warn him to stay out of the way and keep quiet.

The dead woman's dressing room was small, but very nicely appointed. Beside the single window was a dressing table and a stool. The police photographer was pressed against the opposite wall in an attempt to get a full view of the scene.

Delia MacGruder had been seated at the dressing table, applying makeup after apparently taking a bath. She had been clad in a bathrobe, a small, slight woman of about fifty—still attractive of face, if one was to judge by the picture in a silver frame on the table. The face of the body was too contorted from its death throes to judge anything of the kind. The drawer of the dressing table was slightly open, and scattered over the top were various bottles and compacts. To one side stood a cold cup of coffee, half-drunk, with the cream congealing on the top. On the thick carpet by the dead woman lay an ornate handmirror and another compact—open—apparently dropped by the victim.

The body lay sprawled by the stool, the face contorted and blue. Bethancourt shuddered as

he inspected it, then hastily backed away. The doctor looked up at him and grinned. Bethancourt, incapable at the moment of smiling back, stopped and began to peer beneath the dressing table.

"What are you looking for?" asked Gibbons, coming up on his other side.

"That," replied Bethancourt, pointing to a small, slender brush lying neglected against the wall. "She must have dropped it when she died. Or she might have knocked it from the table."

"What is it?"

"An eyeliner brush. That's the eyeliner on the floor over there. Her face is awfully discolored, but as far as I could make out, she'd actually put on all the stuff that's on the table. And she'd started on the eyeliner. Mascara, rouge, and lipstick are missing, so I presume they're in the drawer."

Gibbons walked over to the drawer and opened it farther. Within was a jumble of boxes, pencils, and small bottles. He looked at Bethancourt.

"There," said that young man, pointing. "Mascara, rouge, and a plethora of lipsticks." He grinned. "Going out with a fashion model does give one an edge in these situations."

"Gibbons!"

"Yes, sir?"

Chief Inspector Carmichael came up from where he had been talking to the doctor. "Hello, Phillip," he said genially, as was appropriate to the son of an intimate friend of the head of Scotland Yard. "Following the footprints with us again, are you?"

"I thought I'd just come and have a look, sir, since Jack here did me out of lunch."

"Well, splendid to see you. Gibbons, the doctor definitely says poison. Put the coffee in for analysis and anything else you can find around here that's edible. You might check the bathroom as well."

Gibbons nodded and turned to give orders for the coffee to be preserved. Bethancourt drifted away, wandering out of the room and into the bedroom. The bed was unmade, but otherwise the room was in perfect order. Finding nothing of interest, he wandered farther, into the next room, which was a gentleman's dressing room. Here a closet door stood open and a sweater had been thrown negligently over an armchair. Bethancourt peered into the closet, turned back, and eased open a bureau drawer, where he found an orderly array of socks. The next drawer held shirts.

"There you are." Gibbons stood in the doorway. "Looking

for anything in particular?"

"No. Just being nosy." Bethancourt poked under the shirts.

"I'm going downstairs to interview the maid. I thought you'd like to come."

"Of course. Wait a moment—what's this?"

He withdrew his hand from beneath the shirts and held up a photograph of a girl. A very beautiful girl in a revealing dress.

"My," said Bethancourt. "Oh, my America, my new-found land."

"Let's have a look." Gibbons took the photo, gave a low whistle.

Bethancourt grinned. "It's amazing," he said, "how quickly one's mind can revert to the baser instincts."

"Still," said Gibbons regretfully, "it doesn't necessarily mean anything. Lots of men have mistresses and don't murder their wives."

"True," said Bethancourt. "Or it could be even more innocent than that—a niece or what have you. Well, let's see what the maid has to say."

The maid, a plump woman of about forty, was in tears. The policeman who was with her gave her name for her and it was with great difficulty that Gibbons succeeded in eliciting the information that she had

worked for the MacGruders for five years. Bethancourt sat beside her and patted her hand.

"Now, now," he said soothingly, "you must try to be brave. You must try to help Detective Gibbons here so he can find out who did this dreadful thing."

The maid hiccupped, choked out that it was indeed a dreadful thing and she just couldn't believe it had happened, that poor Mrs. MacGruder was gone all in an instant, just like that. She didn't see how a body was to bear it. Bethancourt patted her hand again and looked helplessly at Gibbons.

"Now, Mrs. Andrews," said that young man, "my men tell me that you say Mr. MacGruder left the house this morning at nine. Was anyone else in the house after that besides yourself and Mrs. MacGruder?"

Mrs. Andrews shook her head vehemently and sobbed.

"Does anyone else usually reside here?"

Another shake of the head.

"No? The MacGruders had no children then?"

Mrs. Andrews sniffed and hiccupped. "Mrs. MacGruder had two sons by her first marriage," she managed. Apparently the thought of these two now motherless boys was more than she could bear, for she burst into fresh sobbing, adding that the

sons did not live in the house.

"Very well, that's very good," said Gibbons encouragingly. "They don't live here. Just so. Where do they live?"

The response was nearly unintelligible.

"I think," said Bethancourt, "she said Cirencester."

"Well, at any rate they don't seem to be in the immediate neighborhood." Gibbons returned his attention to Mrs. Andrews. "Now then," he said, "I'm going to ask you to be very brave and remember about this morning."

Mrs. Andrews' sobs acquired renewed vigor.

It was at this point that Bethancourt sat up and said, "Tea!" in a very firm manner. Both Gibbons and the policeman stared at him. Even Mrs. Andrews cast him a startled glance. Bethancourt, ignoring them all, leapt from the sofa and strode out of the room.

Gibbons shook his head and sighed. "Now, Mrs. Andrews," he began again.

Ten minutes later he had gleaned the bare information that Mr. MacGruder had left the house at nine to catch a train to the suburbs and play golf with some friends who apparently were also a business connection. Mrs. Andrews was dabbling ineffectually at her tears with a tissue when Beth-

ancourt returned, bearing a tray.

"Here we go," he said in an unnaturally cheerful voice. "Here's some nice hot tea for you, Mrs. Andrews. Now you blow your nose and have a sip of this—it'll put you right in a moment. Milk or sugar?"

Mrs. Andrews looked at him gratefully and said she'd like milk. "You're a nice lad," she added.

"You mustn't flatter me, Mrs. Andrews," said Bethancourt, beaming as if the queen had just announced the intention of knighting him. "And don't forget to blow your nose—it's a very important part of the process. Now, doesn't that feel better? Good. Now when did Mr. MacGruder leave the house?"

The tea had an almost magical effect. Mrs. Andrews, although still sniffing and dabbing her eyes, now managed to give a coherent account of the morning. Delia MacGruder, having seen her husband off, had remained in the dining room reading the paper. At about ten thirty she had gone upstairs to bathe and change prior to taking the twelve sixteen train to meet her husband and his friends for lunch. At about eleven she had come down for more coffee and returned upstairs. Mrs. Andrews had heard a thud from

upstairs some twenty minutes later, but just assumed Mrs. MacGruder had dropped something.

"I was vacuuming," she said tearfully, "just doing the living room once over lightly, when I noticed it was a bit past twelve and I thought to myself, Mrs. MacGruder will miss that train if she don't hurry. And then I thought I'd just step up and remind her, thinking maybe she'd got the time mixed up, though that's not like her—always very punctual she was, thinking it rude to keep people waiting. So I go up and knock on her door, but there's no answer, and then I get scared, but I open the door anyhow and there she was, oh, what a horrible sight . . ."

"Very horrible," agreed Bethancourt, with some feeling. "So you ran out and called the ambulance? Or did you go in, try to revive her?"

"I should have done," wailed the woman. "But she looked so awful, like something out of one of those horror films, I just ran straight downstairs with my heart in my throat. I was all a-tremble, just shaking like a leaf, so bad as I could hardly dial the phone . . ."

Here she burst into sobs again. Bethancourt patted her hand and Gibbons murmured that she needn't answer any more questions just now. Then he

and Bethancourt withdrew.

"They've removed the body, sir," said a policeman who was waiting for them in the hall. "And we've gotten hold of the husband—he's on his way back. Should be here any minute."

"Have they finished upstairs?"

"Just about, sir. The fingerprint men are packing up, and the chief says we're to seal the room once they've gone. He said he'd be down to meet the husband and you should wait for him here."

"Very well. I'll be here if Mr. MacGruder arrives before the chief comes down."

The policeman nodded and moved off. Gibbons looked round for Bethancourt, found him across the hall in the study, rifling the drawers of the desk. There was a hard look in his eyes behind the glasses.

"There's a back door in the kitchen," he said. "But it's locked and bolted."

"I know," said Gibbons. "My men checked it out."

"Then you realize that, if the poison was in the coffee, only the maid could have put it there? To get upstairs from the kitchen, you have to pass through the dining room and the living room, where Mrs. Andrews was cleaning. There's no back stair."

"No," said Gibbons, "I hadn't realized." Then he added, "But we don't know there was anything in the coffee."

"That's true." Bethancourt paused, withdrew a handful of letters from the desk. "Here we are," he said. "Letters addressed to 'Dear Mum,' signed by 'Tom.' Return address in Cirencester, last name is Follet. And here's another one, different street, but still Cirencester, signed 'Bill and Annie.'"

"Probably a wife," said Gibbons. "Well, we'll have to find out if they were in Cirencester this morning. There—that must be Mr. MacGruder arriving."

David MacGruder was a well-preserved man of something over forty. He was very pale and held himself in total control. He was accompanied by his wife's solicitor, with whom he had been playing golf. The solicitor was an older man in a pair of highly regrettable plaid trousers.

Gibbons spoke with them briefly, saying the chief inspector would be down presently and would Mr. MacGruder wait for him in the living room? He explained that the body had been taken away and that he had sealed up the dressing room and was leaving a man there. MacGruder nodded dully, accepting everything without question.

Gibbons found Bethancourt outside, sitting on the front stoop with the dog, Cerberus.

"All done?"

Gibbons nodded.

Bethancourt glanced at his watch. "Quarter to three. I guess we'd better run up and find the girls," he said, without much enthusiasm.

"You'd better," retorted Gibbons. "I've got to go to the office and write a report. I've got to put in the coffee for analysis and see that it's marked down for first thing in the morning. I've got to put someone on the track of those two sons in Cirencester. There are dozens of things I've got to do and somewhere in between them all I may find time for a ham sandwich."

"See here," said Bethancourt, "you can't leave me to face Marla's wrath alone."

Gibbons grinned ruthlessly. "Oh, can't I?" he said. "Anyway, it's your own fault. You knew she'd be angry when you insisted on coming with me."

"Ah, well, I thought it would be worth it. And it has been. It's a very interesting problem and I'm going to enjoy working it out for you. Come, Cerberus," he added, ignoring his friend's protests. "It seems we are being deserted in the face of the enemy. Into the breach, old fellow."

Jack Gibbons, having had a very long and busy day, leaned comfortably back in one of Phillip Bethancourt's roomy armchairs, planted his feet on one of the several coffee tables in the room, and took a deep swallow of single malt whisky. Bethancourt occupied a spacious and very comfortable flat, if a trifle oddly furnished. It had been decorated solely by its owner, who had money enough but a very eccentric taste. He was very fond of coffee tables.

He emerged now from the kitchen, a cigarette between his lips.

"The lasagna is in the oven," he said. "It should take about half an hour." He turned to the bar to replenish his drink.

"I would have thought," ventured Gibbons, "that you would have been busy with Marla tonight. After yesterday, I mean."

Bethancourt made a face. "She's madder than I gave her credit for," he admitted, seating himself on the edge of a black lacquer coffee table. "She didn't go to the Gardens yesterday—she took the car all the way to Brighton just to make sure I wouldn't find her and would spend a lot of time looking. We had a beautiful row last night," he concluded glumly.

"Appalling."

"Yes, it was, rather." Bethan-

court shrugged and turned to other things. "What did the postmortem find?" he asked.

"Delia MacGruder died of cyanide poisoning."

"In the coffee?"

"There was nothing in the coffee but cream. Neither was there anything in the pot, which figures, as the maid had also been drinking out of it."

"But it would be very easy to poison one cup and then, once it had done its work, take it away, wash it out, and fill it with fresh coffee."

"It would only be easy if you were the maid, as you pointed out yesterday. And if she really did do it, why should she claim to have been in the living room, making it impossible for anyone else to get to the coffee? She could just as well have been cleaning the study or the bathroom or anywhere in the house."

"She could be shielding someone else," suggested Bethancourt. "Possibly she let someone into the house."

"Possibly. It's also perfectly possible that someone else came in through the front door."

"What about MacGruder?"

Gibbons shook his head regretfully. "He would be a beautiful suspect, but his alibi has been confirmed. He left the house at nine and caught the nine eighteen from Victoria. We know this because the sol-

icator met him at the station. They proceeded directly to the golf course, where they met a third man and went out to the course. They finished at about twelve thirty and went to the clubhouse to meet their wives for lunch. Instead they met a policeman who informed them of Mrs. MacGruder's death."

"Well, he's out then."

"Yes, and it's a pity because he's the only one so far with a motive. In fact, it's classic. Mrs. MacGruder's first husband was a wealthy man with a thriving business. He died eight years ago in a car accident, leaving everything to his wife. Mrs. MacGruder, who already had money of her own, met and married David MacGruder almost six years ago. Prior to that he had been a businessman earning a good salary, but by no means a spectacular one. He retired after his marriage. And he's eight years younger than his wife was."

"But he couldn't have done it."

"No. Nor could anyone except the maid. Who else could walk in on her while she was getting dressed and not be immediately challenged?"

Phillip leaned back. "A lover," he suggested, "or her sons. Or another woman."

"Well, we haven't finished checking the sons' movements

yet. And I suppose they might have had keys to the townhouse. Another woman would have had trouble getting in."

Bethancourt lit a cigarette and sipped his whisky. "Not if she had a key," he said. "And it's really amazing how many people do have keys to other people's flats. A neighbor, for instance, who was asked to look in occasionally when last the MacGruders were traveling. But by far the easiest solution is the maid."

"No," said Gibbons, "it doesn't feel right to me. Where would she get cyanide to begin with? And if she did get it, why wouldn't she put all she had in the coffee? Mrs. MacGruder had taken a very small dose—that's all it takes, of course, but most people don't know that. In nine out of ten poison cases, you get an overdose. Moreover, why would she do it at all?"

Bethancourt waved a hand. "A million reasons. A deep-seated hatred of her employer. Maybe Mrs. MacGruder left her a fortune in her will. But I will grant you that it's not likely. Unfortunately, if you do away with the maid, you also do away with the idea that the poison was in the coffee. And that leaves us with another problem."

"Which is?"

"That someone popped in on

her while she was in the middle of dressing and making up, just after breakfast and not anywhere near lunch or even evenings, and got her to eat something. I mean, what does one say?"

"One says, 'Hullo, I can see I'm interrupting, but I just wanted you to taste these marvelous chocolates.'"

"Possibly," admitted Bethancourt grudgingly. "But think about what happens then. Mrs. MacGruder puts down her mirror and makeup and eats a chocolate or whatever. It kills her and in falling, she knocks the handmirror and the makeup she was just using off the table, but nothing else."

"Perhaps she had put them down on a different part of the table."

"Why should she? She put everything else as she finished with it right above the drawer. Habit is very strong, Jack. I invariably put the shaving cream down on the top of the sink. It's routine—I always do it. When interrupted in the act of using it, habit takes over and I still put it on top of the sink. But it has to be something really important to interrupt me at all. Haven't you ever noticed how women hate to be interrupted in the middle of putting on makeup? They look silly half madeup and they know it. What

would you do if someone popped in on you while you were shaving?"

"I'd say, 'Excuse me—you don't mind if I just finish up here?'"

"Exactly."

"That's all very well, Phillip, but it must have happened that way. Maybe Mrs. MacGruder had an overpowering passion for chocolates."

"No," said Bethancourt. "It just means that there's something about it we haven't figured out yet."

"Not to mention who it was that fed it to her."

"There is that. Anyone else on your list of suspects?"

"The family seems the best bet. After all, she did have money to leave, and ten to one she left it to her husband and sons. But we don't know about that yet. Otherwise, we haven't uncovered anyone else with a motive."

"What about the girl in the photograph?"

Gibbons grinned. "I asked about that. Mr. MacGruder claims she's an old friend of the family's. I said in that case, there was no reason we shouldn't have her address and he more or less had to give it to me. Her name's Sarah Duncan and she says Mr. MacGruder is just a friend with whom she dines occasionally."

Bethancourt reached for the bottle and topped up both glasses. "Does she have an alibi?" he asked.

"Not exactly. She's an actress. She was at an audition that morning, but it was a cattle call and she didn't get on-stage until one. She was definitely seen there, but the times are hazy. She could have slipped out and come back. But, obviously, if she was MacGruder's mistress, she wouldn't have known his wife. If she had suddenly appeared in the dressing room, it's hardly likely that Mrs. MacGruder would have stopped to eat anything she gave her. Besides, it would be a bit awkward, what?"

"Just a bit, I should imagine. Still, it might be worth looking into. I'll do that, if you like. As soon as I make up with Marla."

"What do you mean?"

"What budding actress wouldn't jump at the chance to become friends with Marla Tate? Marla runs in the right and very elite circles."

"That's true. All right then. And meanwhile, I'll find out about the sons. After all, it's only been twenty-four hours. Tomorrow may turn up a lot."

"Tomorrow may turn up a lot for you," retorted Bethancourt. "I've got to spend the day making up to Marla and, if there's any time left after that, there's

that article that should have been finished last Tuesday."

Gibbons grinned. Sixty years ago, a young man possessed of as much family money as Bethancourt would have been expected to do very little beyond upholding the title of "gentleman." Now, however, society dictated that one should not be idle, and various projects had been suggested to Phillip by his parents upon completion of his education. None of these had had any great success, Bethancourt being disinclined toward organization and regular schedules. No compromise was reached until he wrote an article for a periodical and was pleasantly surprised to find it accepted for publication. He immediately sent copies to all his relatives, wrote a second piece which was also published, and thereupon called himself a writer, turning out articles with just enough frequency to appease his parents. Gibbons, who had to work for a living, was not in the least sympathetic toward the problems of this so-called career.

"You'll get it out all right," he said now, draining his glass. "And if you don't, it won't matter much." Bethancourt glared at him and he laughed. "Oh, come," he said, "you know for all your complaining nothing catastrophic ever happens."

"I think," said Bethancourt, with a great deal of wounded dignity, "that it's time I got the lasagna out of the oven." He moved off to the kitchen while Gibbons chuckled.

Phillip Bethancourt lay propped up in bed two mornings later, a cup of coffee balanced on his stomach. Marla had been appeased for his neglect and now he was leisurely watching her put on makeup. He had never really followed the whole process before. In a moment or two, Marla noticed his watchful gaze and looked up from her mirror.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked.

"No, no," he assured her. He had an idea. Setting aside the coffee, he rolled out of bed and went to the kitchen. In a moment he returned, munching on a piece of cheese.

"Mmm," he said, as casually as he could. "Really delicious, this."

Marla threw him a startled glance. "Cheese?" she said. "First thing in the morning?"

"This is something special," he assured her. "Have a taste?"

"In a minute, darling." She drew a pencil line along her lid, smudged it expertly with a finger.

Bethancourt wandered back to the bed, absently laying the

cheese on the nightstand. Of course, Marla never ate anything in the morning. Still, she liked cheese. And Delia MacGruder had just finished breakfast. Even if one really liked something, would one be quite so eager for it directly after a meal? Still, people were odd about food. Mrs. MacGruder had been slender; perhaps she was on a perennial diet...

Marla set aside her mirror and rose. "Aren't you ever going to get up?" she asked as she moved toward the bathroom.

Bethancourt shrugged for answer. Then there was the matter of the keys. He no longer had keys to his own parents' house; then again, they had moved since he had left home.

"Marla," he called, "do you have keys to your parents' house?"

She emerged, drying her hands, and gazed curiously at him. "They live in Yorkshire," she said. "Why on earth should I have keys to a house in Yorkshire?"

"Just wondering."

She shook her head and left the room.

Marla had keys to his apartment; so did the couple downstairs and the cleaning lady. Probably if someone wanted his keys it would not be too difficult to abscond with a set long

enough to make copies. No, keys were not the problem.

"Phillip," said Marla from the doorway, an exasperated look on her face, "what on earth is wrong with you this morning? That cheese in the kitchen is the same stuff we were eating two nights ago when you said you knew a place we could get better."

The phone rang that evening as Bethancourt, true to form, was emerging from the bath some ten minutes after he had been appointed to leave the flat.

"I've been to Cirencester," said Gibbons cheerfully. "The sons are shaping up nicely. As you so cleverly deduced, one of them is married—the younger one, although they're much of an age: twenty-five and twenty-six. The younger one is William and is married to Annie. Tom, the elder, lives alone and I think he's gay."

"That," said Bethancourt dryly, "does not mean he's a murderer."

"True," said Gibbons cheerfully, "but listen to this: he's got his own small antique shop, which he runs with the help of an assistant. He was not there on Sunday morning."

"Why on earth should he be?" asked Bethancourt. "Does he break the Sabbath by having

his shop open on Sundays?"

"No, but evidently he usually spends Sunday mornings there to go over inventory, leaving around eleven to have brunch with his brother and his wife. Last Sunday, however, he drove to Windsor to have a look at some antiques a gentleman there was selling."

"And did he indeed arrive in Windsor?"

"Oh, yes, dead on time for his appointment at one thirty. He had plenty of time, especially since a neighbor says she saw his car leaving at about eight."

"Eight?" mused Bethancourt. "That's pretty early to be starting for a one thirty appointment. It's about an hour and a half or so to Windsor from Cirencester."

"He says he stopped by the shop, just to look in and make sure everything was all right. No one saw him, however. He also claims to have stopped at a pub for an early lunch before keeping his appointment, but no one at the pub remembers him either. We're in the midst of looking into his finances to see if he was in need of money. Antiques is not a cheap business, you know."

"So I do. What about the other brother?"

"Bill was at home with his wife. They had brunch alone, since Tom wasn't coming, and

were having a perfectly normal, uneventful Sunday until they heard the news from MacGruder. Bill works with an investment firm in Bristol. Oh, and his wife is pregnant."

"Life and death," commented Bethancourt. "How poignant."

"Well," said Gibbons, ignoring this, "I think that's the crop. Except that neither brother thought much of their stepfather. They'd heard rumors that he cheated on their mother."

"Virtuous man that I am," said Bethancourt, "I am just about to venture out and either prove or disprove that rumor. Sarah Duncan is performing in a disreputable little showcase in —, to which Marla has ungraciously agreed to go."

"In return, no doubt, for some favor on your part. Really, Philip, sometimes I wonder why you put up with her."

"Take a good look at her next time you're 'round," retorted Bethancourt. "The answer should be fairly obvious. I'll report tomorrow."

"That," said Marla, as they emerged from the theater, "was dreadful. And that little girl was particularly dreadful. I really don't see why I should make up to her."

"You should make up to her,"

answered Bethancourt, "because I, the beloved object in your life, have asked you to. Besides, I've promised you that necklace you've taken a fancy to if you do. Come on, the pub should be just around here."

"Don't be silly," said Marla, "we can't go to the pub yet—they'll all still be at the theater, changing. If we're to do this properly, we have to make an entrance."

"Oh. Quite right, my love." Bethancourt looked about. The weather was still remarkably mild, but a fine rain was falling. "There," he said, "that restaurant looks fairly expensive—too expensive for anyone in that play to be in. We'll go there."

Accordingly, they made their way across the street, re-emerging some forty-five minutes later to proceed to the pub frequented by the cast and crew of *Doing the Bunk*.

Marla's presence in the audience had been duly noted by both these parties, who were avidly discussing it when she swept in, shaking the rain from her famous coppery hair. She regarded the assembled group with something of the attitude of a queen surveying a not very promising group of peasants until Bethancourt poked her in the ribs. Suddenly she smiled.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Look,

Phillip, we've stumbled on the cast of that delightful little play." Then she waded into them, effusively commenting on the play and their performances in it.

This, naturally, was well-received. Bethancourt steered her steadily toward Sarah Duncan, who had changed her rather skimpy excuse for a costume (in Bethancourt's opinion the sole highlight of the play) for a black jumper and skirt. Marla did her part magnificently, complimenting the girl and initiating a conversation about acting and the difficulties of getting started. It was all going quite well until Bethancourt noticed the danger signs: Marla was getting bored and there were three young men bearing down on her other side, vying for her attention. In no time at all she had abandoned her escort and Sarah Duncan and was happily exchanging quips with her circle of admirers.

"She's marvelous," said Sarah with a sigh. "Even more beautiful than her photographs." She looked at Bethancourt. "Do you think she'd mind if I asked her how she got started? I've tried to do some modeling, but you need really good pictures before they'll even look at you."

"Marla always had the best pictures she could get," lied Bethancourt. "But, you see, she also had me."

Sarah looked at him questioningly.

"Well," he said modestly, hoping fervently that Marla was not listening, "I happen to have a bit of money, you see. Having a sponsor," he added, "always helps. But a pretty girl like you shouldn't find that much of a problem."

"No," she answered, considering. Then, in a burst of confidentiality, "Of course, I do have someone and he's been helpful here and there. But he's not really connected to any theater people."

Bethancourt laughed. "Neither was I," he said. "I learned quick enough. You should have him take you round to the right places, buy a few drinks for people."

She frowned. "Well, that's not always possible."

"Ah," said Bethancourt, with quick understanding. "Married, is he?"

"Well, yes."

"Here, let me get you another. Bartender, two pints of bitter here."

Sarah drank deeply.

"Married men are difficult," went on Bethancourt sympathetically. "Or so I've heard. I've never been one, myself."

She giggled a little at that and then sobered, frowning again. She looked up at Bethancourt. "Actually," she said, "I'm in a bit of a pickle with my

married man. You see, he isn't married any more. His wife died just the other day—rather horrible it was really. But you see my problem is that—supposing he asks me to marry him now? I mean, I like him well enough, and he's been very helpful with money and things, but he's a bit older than me and, well, I don't really think I want to marry him."

"That's difficult," said Bethancourt, trying hard not to gloat. "But, of course, the sea is full of fish, don't you know. And he'll have to wait a while anyway, if his wife's just died. Did she go suddenly?"

"Oh, very. In fact," she said, lowering her voice, "they say it was murder."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Bethancourt, feigning astonishment. He was forming another appropriate question when Marla suddenly noticed that if several men were paying court to her, Phillip had become involved in a tete-a-tete with a woman whose breasts were far too perfect to be safe. Marla's own breasts were on the small side and she was correspondingly sensitive to the size and shape of breasts that might be superior to her own. Sarah's endowments had been rather prominently featured in the play and Marla had no doubts about them or the rest of the girl's features: far too pretty for Phillip

to be trusted with. She cut in on their conversation like a buzz saw into a tree trunk.

"Darling," she said, expertly wrapping herself around him, apparently overcome with affection, "I've finished my drink. Don't you think it's time we were going?"

Bethancourt considered rapidly. There was very little more, he was convinced, to be gotten out of Sarah Duncan and he had only just made up with Marla yesterday. To risk another bout with her mercurial temper could be dangerous. "Absolutely, beloved," he answered.

Bethancourt found Gibbons in his office the next afternoon surrounded by photographs of the scene of the crime and various reports.

"Usefully employed, as always," said Bethancourt cheerfully, shedding his Burberry and slumping into a chair. Cerebus followed his master in and arranged himself elegantly at his feet.

His friend shot him a harried look. "Carmichael's been in twice this morning to ask how it's going," he said with a groan. "The press is having a field day, and MacGruder, now he's over the shock, is making a fuss. And I'm more confused than ever."

"Oh?" asked Bethancourt,

lighting a cigarette, unmoved by this panoply of catastrophes. "I thought the sons were shaping up nicely."

"I've got the preliminary report on their finances back," said Gibbons, searching amid the mass of papers on his desk. "And it's exactly the opposite of what would make me happy. To top it off, we haven't had an ounce of luck in tracing cyanide to anyone."

"What's wrong with their finances?" asked Bethancourt, lifting a sheaf of reports in search of an ashtray.

"Tom, son number one, has a hefty bank account. He's invested wisely and his antiques business is booming. He buys nothing he can't afford and sells everything at a goodly markup. However, over the past few months there have been fairly hefty withdrawals."

"Aha!" said Bethancourt with satisfaction. "Blackmail, perhaps?"

"Not unless it's his brother who's been blackmailing him," said Gibbons. "The withdrawals are all in the form of checks made out to his brother. So my man looked into Bill's affairs as well and found son number two has made some very risky investments and is presently almost broke. He's been borrowing from his brother to meet his household expenses and there

are still outstanding bills. Big ones."

"Well, there's a motive for you, at any rate," said Bethancourt. "It could be he'd appealed to his mother for money and she'd said no. Possibly his brother was cutting him off as well."

"Don't flick your ashes in the wastebasket: it's full of paper."

"You've buried your ashtray so deep a gravedigger couldn't find it."

"It's right there, fathead."

"Where? Oh, I see, under the desk. Of course, how silly of me." Bethancourt retrieved the ashtray and returned to the subject at hand. "There," he said, "all right and proper. So, suspicion lifts itself from Tom and fastens itself firmly on Bill."

"That's just what it doesn't do," said Gibbons gloomily. "Bill, as you will remember, was at home on Sunday morning with his wife."

"The pregnant one," supplied Bethancourt. "I remember perfectly. But husbands and wives have been known to become accomplices before."

"Not when they're sitting at home. Their neighbor spent the morning washing his car in his driveway. It took him a couple of hours all told, and he swears that from ten to twelve Bill's car was sitting empty in the drive."

"That's rather difficult," said Bethancourt slowly. "I don't really see, if brother Tom was no longer willing to lend him money, that he would be willing to murder their mother for Bill."

"Not bloody likely. Anyway, they're reading the will at four o'clock and I'm going down to hear it and talk to Bill about his financial problems afterward."

"Then you'd better hurry," said Bethancourt. "It's a quarter to now."

"Good Lord, really?" said Gibbons, springing up.

"Here," said Bethancourt, "I'll go with you. We'll take a taxi and I can tell you all about Sarah Duncan on the way."

"Oh, right, I'd forgotten about her," said Gibbons, flinging his overcoat around him. "What did you find?"

"She was definitely having an affair with MacGruder," answered Bethancourt, following him. "But she doesn't want to marry him. I think she was telling the truth. She didn't do it. Cerberus, watch your tail."

Gibbons shook his head.

"It's a funny case," he said. "All our leads seem to just peter out."

"Because we haven't got hold of the right one yet," said Bethancourt, ushering him out the door.

Delia MacGruder had left a bequest of one hundred thousand pounds to each of her sons. There was a small bequest of five hundred pounds to the maid, Mrs. Andrews. The rest of the estate, including investments and real estate, was left to her husband. Nobody in the solicitor's office seemed surprised or upset by the will. They were all dressed somberly, as befitted the occasion: MacGruder and his stepson Bill in charcoal grey suits and dark ties, Annie and Mrs. Andrews in black dresses; Tom was not present. Bethancourt had an instant of wishing he was not wearing a tweed jacket and khakis.

The reading of the will did not take long. The family expressed thanks to the solicitor, who had abandoned his plaid trousers for a dark blue pinstripe. He explained that of course probate would be held up while the police concluded their investigation into this tragic occurrence. Everyone seemed united in ignoring the presence of the police in the room. Gibbons finally approached the solicitor and asked if there was a room where he could ask Bill and his wife a few questions.

"That's ridiculous!" snapped MacGruder, before the solicitor could respond. "Perhaps if the

police would stop plaguing my family, you'd be able to concentrate on finding my wife's murderer."

Gibbons shot him a cool stare, but, "Just doing my duty, sir," was all he said.

"We're happy to help," said Annie quietly, but firmly. She was six or seven months pregnant and her paleness was emphasized by the black of her dress.

MacGruder snorted. "It's stupid to think you had anything to do with it," he said belligerently. "And I resent it, I resent it very much."

"It seems to me," said Bill with a glint in his eyes, "that it's for us to resent, not you."

"You can use the conference room," interrupted the solicitor hurriedly. "My secretary will show you."

MacGruder stormed out and the others followed him more quietly.

They settled at one end of the oval oak table, Gibbons introducing Bethancourt as his colleague.

"What a beautiful dog," said Annie, holding out a hand to Cerberus who deigned to sniff it politely.

"Thank you," said Bethancourt. "His name's Cerberus."

She shot him a startled glance.

"I'm sorry to have to trouble

you again," said Gibbons, "but there are just a few things that want clearing up. I understand, Mr. Follet, that you had been borrowing heavily from your brother to cover your debts."

"What?" Abandoning Cerberus, Annie sat up straight and stared at her husband. "What does he mean, Bill? What debts?"

Follet turned to her with a miserable look in his eyes. "I'm sorry," he said hopelessly. "I—I didn't want you to know. Really, sergeant, couldn't you have asked me in private?" he demanded, turning to Gibbons.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Gibbons, somewhat taken aback. "I had no idea your wife didn't know of your financial affairs."

"But what's wrong?" asked Annie. "We were doing so well—you said so when we—when we planned the baby."

"I'm sorry," said Follet again. "It was the Conglomerated options. It—it looked like such a good thing, Annie. You know I told you about it—"

"I remember," she said, a little dazedly. "You sold off some of our other investments to go into it. But it was doing well, Bill. You said it was."

Follet gulped. "I'm afraid I lied. It was totally unexpected, but, well, I lost everything I put into it. Everybody did. And now

I owe on the options. And, Annie, I put our savings into it as well."

Her eyes widened. "Our savings?" she whispered. "Bill, how could you?"

"Oh, I didn't use all of it. But the rest went when I had to pay on the options. God," he shook his head, "I should have known. I've said it to myself a hundred times. I should have known. But everyone at the office seemed so sure . . ."

Gibbons coughed diplomatically. "I'm very sorry, ma'am, to have to have been the cause of this news."

"No," she said softly. "It was better that I should know." She was staring dully at her stomach, one hand resting on the bulge, while her husband gazed helplessly at her.

"We'll be all right," he said reassuringly. "I'm afraid I haven't been any too smart with the money I've borrowed from Tom, but with mother's inheritance I can at least replace our savings and use the rest to get us back on our feet."

"Yes, of course," she said, not looking up. Cerberus sniffed and gently put his nose in her lap. She smiled a little at him and rested one hand on his head.

"Good boy," muttered Bethancourt under his breath.

Gibbons was coughing again.

"Your brother wasn't here today, Mr. Follet?" he asked.

"What?" Follet turned his attention back to the detective. "No, he wasn't. His assistant had an accident this morning—broke his arm falling off a ladder—and had to go to hospital. Tom didn't want to close the shop and, anyway, we all knew what was in the will. This was really just a formality. I said I'd give him a full report."

"I see," said Gibbons. "Now, about this money, sir. Your brother had full knowledge of what had happened?"

"Yes, of course. Tom's careful; he wouldn't have lent me that kind of money if I hadn't explained."

"He did not himself lose any in this investment?"

Follet gave a dry laugh. "Not a penny. He wouldn't touch it. He's a very conservative sort of man with money, sergeant. I suppose I would have done well to follow his example."

"And had you applied to your mother or stepfather for help as well?"

Follet looked surprised. "Of course not. I think I told you, sergeant, that I don't much care for David MacGruder. And I didn't want Mother to know any more than I wanted Annie to. Mother was so proud of me. Of both Tom and me. Tom's always been her favorite, I sup-

pose, but she was proud of me, too. I couldn't bear to let her know how I'd mucked up."

"I understand, sir. You said just now that your mother's inheritance would help you over the bad times. What, may I ask, did you plan to do before her death occurred?"

"Borrow more from Tom, I suppose. There wasn't much else I could do. He'd have given it to me, but the devil of it was, I couldn't see my way to paying him back. I mean, with the baby coming and all, there just wasn't much chance I would have any extra money for years."

"Your brother understood this?"

"Oh, yes. He wasn't too pleased, mind. Talked to me pretty sharply the last time I had to ask him for more. Said if I was going to borrow any more, he wanted to see to it that I didn't invest in anything foolish. I couldn't very well argue with him."

"Naturally not," agreed Gibbons. "Just one other thing, sir. I noticed your car when I visited you before. A Ford Fiesta, I believe. Do you have a second car for your wife?"

Follet looked puzzled. "Yes," he answered. "A Mini. It's rather elderly; we bought it when we were first married."

"But it wasn't there on Monday when I visited you."

"No," broke in Annie. "It was in the garage. Don't you remember, Bill? It broke down on me on Saturday. We didn't get it back till Wednesday."

"I see," said Gibbons. "What garage do you use?"

"Gleason's on the corner of our lane and the Chedworth road. But what on earth does that have to do with anything?"

"We just like to verify everything, sir. You know the police—everything has to be confirmed." Gibbons smiled.

"But I don't understand. Is there something wrong with the car? They said at the shop the alternator bolt had sheared."

"Ah, was that it? That'll stop a car dead, sure enough," said Gibbons. "Well, thank you very much for your time. And, again, I'm very sorry to have been indiscreet."

He and Bethancourt extricated themselves with some difficulty, emerging eventually into the street with the dog at their heels.

"Well," said Gibbons, "that was worse than expected. And now I've got to run all the way over to Cirencester and talk to the mechanic and the brother again. And I might as well see that neighbor while I'm about it." He glanced at his companion. "I don't suppose," he suggested, "that you would want to give me a lift?"

"To Cirencester?" Bethancourt considered. He was really more the armchair sort of detective; he greatly preferred to let Gibbons collect all the information and deliver it so that he could put the pieces of the puzzle together in his head. Still, he had to admit that meeting the people concerned often helped. And Tom Follet was still the prime suspect. "I suppose I could," he said.

"It could provide the only bright spot in my day if you would," said Gibbons persuasively.

"By all means then. Every day should have a bright spot." He hailed a passing taxi. "We'll have to go round to the garage. MacGruder's quite the obnoxious one, isn't he?"

Gibbons grunted as he got into the cab and made room for Bethancourt beside him. "I've talked to some of the MacGruders' friends," he said. "They all seem agreed that the marriage was a happy one, and that MacGruder is a charming fellow."

"Really?"

"Yes, he evidently got on with almost everyone except the stepsons. Still, I suppose having your wife murdered is something that could adversely affect your temperment."

"I suppose," said Bethancourt thoughtfully.

Geason was just closing up shop for the day when they arrived, but he appeared willing enough to answer their questions. Yes, the Mini had been towed in on Saturday and put in the lot. Yes, of course he locked the lot when he left for the night. Well, no, he hadn't got a chance to look at it on Saturday. In fact, he hadn't done anything with it till Monday afternoon—he was a busy man. But there wasn't much wrong, really. The alternator bolt had sheared and dropped out, and that meant the alternator had begun to drop, and *that* meant the connections had come loose and there was no electricity. Can't run a car without electricity. He had started to fix it on Tuesday, but then there was that Mercedes come in and what with that and another thing, he didn't get the job finished till Wednesday morning. No, of course he didn't work on Sundays. Well, he supposed someone could have come in on Sunday, but they would have had to pick the lock on the gates and it had looked all right to him when he opened up on Monday. Yes, someone might have borrowed the Mini, or any other car for that matter, but they would have had to fix it first. It stood to reason he didn't have running cars here—people

didn't bring in cars that worked all right.

"But you don't know for certain that there was anything wrong with the Mini before Monday afternoon?" asked Gibbons.

Gleason snorted. "Of course there was something wrong with it," he said. "It died, didn't it? George had a look at it when he went to tow it and if it had been a little fiddling thing, he would have put it right on the spot."

"I see. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Gleason."

"Where to now?" asked Bethancourt, once they were back in the Jaguar.

"I guess we'd better go see if Tom Follet's still at his shop. Take a right at the corner."

Bethancourt eased the car out into the traffic and followed directions. "Well," he said, "it doesn't look too promising, does it? I somehow doubt that a well-brought up Englishman like Bill Follet knows how to pick locks."

"No, and it doesn't seem as if he could have gotten a copy of a key either," Gibbons sighed.

"Cheer up," said Bethancourt. "You've still got one son who doesn't have an alibi and who was in the neighborhood of the murder."

"And who apparently has no motive."

"One hundred thousand

pounds is plenty of motive," replied Bethancourt. "Oh, I know he was doing well enough, but he's in antiques. Supposing there was a particularly juicy piece he desperately wanted? Something really magnificent that costs a bundle. He could have developed a mania or what have you for it. People have done murder for less."

"I guess so," said Gibbons gloomily.

Follet's Antiques was a small shop, but very well appointed, with every piece set off advantageously. There was a goodly mixture of styles and periods, but none of it seemed to clash. Bethancourt peered closely at an exquisite Chinese vase.

"That's the best piece in the shop," said a voice. "Good afternoon, Sergeant Gibbons."

Tom Follet was a tall, thin young man who looked very different from his brother. He was much darker in complexion and his face was longer. He smiled at them.

"I take it," he said, "that I inherited enough today to make me an even better suspect?"

"Yes," said Gibbons frankly, "if only there was some evidence that you needed it."

Follet shook his head. "If I had needed it, she would have given it to me. My mother was

a generous woman and I loved her deeply. She was really a rare person. Everyone who knew her loved her—except, of course, for my stepfather.”

“Why not him?” asked Bethancourt curiously. “He married her and it seems the marriage was a happy one.”

“He married her for her money and he cheated on her,” said Follet shortly. “She knew he had other women, too, but she wouldn’t listen to a word about it. Said she was getting on and she knew he loved her. She’d just never run into someone who didn’t love her before, that was all.”

“But they were happy?” persisted Bethancourt.

“I suppose they were. Why shouldn’t they be? He had the money he wanted and she had him. He was very charming and she loved him. And, really, Bill and I never made much of a fuss about it. She was desolate when our father died and I think we both felt that she deserved what happiness she could find. So long as she remained deluded about MacGruder, what was the harm? And he’d never leave the money.”

“But you don’t think he killed her?”

Follet’s face darkened. “How could he have?” he asked. “He was miles away, playing golf, wasn’t he?”

“Yes,” said Gibbons, “I’m afraid his alibi is confirmed in every particular. But I really came today to ask you about your brother.”

“Bill? I hope you’re not suspecting him now. He was with Annie all day anyhow.”

“That’s true,” said Gibbons. “No, it’s another matter. I understand you made several checks for rather large sums out to him over the past four months. Why was that?”

“He needed money,” answered Follet promptly. “He’d made some very foolish investments and overextended himself as well. I warned him against it at the time. Frankly, I would have been inclined to lend him very little, as a lesson to him. But there was Annie and the baby to consider.”

“Did she ask you for money, too?”

“Oh, no, she knew nothing about it. Bill was quite anxious lest she find out—he didn’t want her to be disappointed in him. I told him it would be better to let her know what had happened, but he would have none of it.”

“Do you know if he applied to his mother for loans as well?”

“No, he didn’t. The same went for her as went for Annie. I said he was silly. Mother had enough to completely restore his losses, and she would have given it to

him if it took all she had. But he couldn't bear the thought of her knowing what a fool he'd been, so I helped him out as best I could." He grinned. "I suppose I was just as silly. I could have told Mother I'd spent a lot on a fake and had her give me the money to give to Bill. But I didn't want her thinking less of me any more than Bill did. It's not that she would have complained, or been anything but sympathetic, mind. But there it is. We wanted her to be proud of us."

"And of course," said Bethancourt, "there was no reason that she should be disappointed in you. It's hard to lie about something like that."

"Yes, it is."

"This is a delicate question, Mr. Follet, but I do need to ask it. Was your mother aware that you are gay?"

"Yes," answered Follet unemotionally. "She knew."

"And how did she feel about that?"

"We didn't discuss it much. Naturally she was displeased, but my mother was good with unpleasant facts. Like David's infidelity. If there was nothing to be done about it, she just left it alone."

"I see."

There was a pause and then Gibbons asked suddenly, "What do you do if you find a piece you

can't afford 'but would like to have?"

"I don't buy it," answered Follet. "Everything in the shop is for sale, sergeant. If I had a hankering after, say, a Fabergé egg, it would be pointless to go into debt for it just to sell it to someone else."

"But if you wanted it for yourself?"

"That," said Follet seriously, "would have been more foolish than Bill and his investments."

The Foxes lived next door to Bill and Annie Follet. Mrs. Fox, a woman of about sixty, opened the door to them.

"No," she said when asked, "Jim isn't back yet. Don't get home for another half hour or so."

"We just wanted to go over what he told the other policeman the other day," explained Gibbons.

"Oh, about the car," she said. "Well, he was washing and polishing for a solid two hours, I can tell you that. I brought him out some tea once, and a beer a little later when he was almost done."

"And when would that have been, Mrs. Fox?"

"He went out straight after breakfast. We have it late on Sundays, so it might have been ten o'clock when he started.

Maybe about ten thirty I came out with the tea. And then I did up the kitchen and went up to make the bed and have my bath. It was when I came down and found him still at it that I brought out the beer. Must have been getting on for noon. Yes, it was, because I asked him, would he be done in time for lunch and he said yes."

"And the Follets' car was parked in their drive both times when you came out?"

"His car was. The red one. I don't remember seeing her car."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Fox. Do you know the Follets well?"

"I see them often enough, but we don't have them over, nor them us. We're a bit elderly for them."

"Have you ever seen Mrs. MacGruder, Mr. Follet's mother?"

"She's been down once or twice. A very nice woman, and I was awful sorry to hear about her being killed like that. Annie spoke of her often—always said what a wonderful person she was. Really fond of her, she seemed, and that's not always the case with mothers and daughters-in-law. In fact, I think on Sunday as ever was, Annie said her mother-in-law would be coming down when the baby was born, and how glad she was about it."

"You saw Annie on Sunday?"

"Oh, yes, I went out back after breakfast to feed the dog and they were both out there in the garden, looking at their herbs. I waved and we just passed the time of day for a minute or two."

"What time would this have been, Mrs. Fox?"

"Well, let's see. It was before I took Jim the tea, so it must have been around ten fifteen, maybe a little later."

"Ten fifteen? Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Fox. You've been a very great help."

"Isn't that just the way of it?" grumbled Gibbons when they were back in the car. "If I'd gone to see her first, I needn't have bothered with Gleason at all. Or if the bloody police out here had thought to talk to her as well as her husband."

"Yes," said Bethancourt absently. "You know, Jack, I think we've got the wrong end of this case altogether. Look at what we've got so far: a dead woman with three people who stood to gain by her death. Two of them couldn't possibly have murdered her, the third could have, but has no motive. I suppose you asked the solicitor whether she had had any intention of changing her will?"

"I did. She didn't, at least not so far as he knew."

"I think it's time we had an-

other talk with Mr. MacGruder."

MacGruder did not look at all pleased to see them but, when pressed, invited them in. He led the way to the living room, but did not offer them seats.

"Well?" he demanded. "What is it now?"

"We wanted to ask you some questions about your stepson Tom," said Gibbons.

"Still harping on the family? Well, go ahead."

"Did your wife know that he was a homosexual?"

"Of course," grunted MacGruder. "There was no secret about it."

"Did they ever quarrel about it? Or about anything to your knowledge?"

"Well," said MacGruder thoughtfully, "there was some kind of a row that last time he visited."

"When would that have been?"

"A month ago, maybe. I don't know what it was about. I know she had been worried about him—all this AIDS going around, you know. She might have said something that set him off. Anyway, she was pretty upset after he left. Said he was unreasonable and he had better get over it."

"Did she suggest she might want to change her will?"

"Change it?" MacGruder looked startled. "Never. Oh, you mean Tom. No, she never said anything, although she might not have. It would be like her to take care of it herself and then tell me afterwards."

"She didn't see Tom again before she died?"

"No. She went down to Cirencester about a week before she was killed, but Tom had gone to an auction that day and wasn't around. She was back for dinner that night, as I recollect."

"But you didn't hear what the argument was about?"

"No," said MacGruder irritably. "Didn't I just say I hadn't?"

"Just so," said Gibbons soothingly. "Well, thank you very much, Mr. MacGruder. We won't take up any more of your time."

"That's the first decent bit of information I've had in a long time," said Gibbons. "Can you drop me by the Yard? I'd like to call the brothers again and get some corroboration, if any."

"His times are right."

"What? Oh, yes, you mean about the visits. Yes, that all works out well enough. And it's fortunate that Bill and Annie saw her after Tom. She may have said something to them about the argument."

"They may not be very willing to tell you, if she did," said Bethancourt. "I imagine their loyalties lie with Tom rather than with MacGruder."

"Well, I have to ask, don't I? If they won't say anything, perhaps one of her friends will—there's that widow she was such great friends with. I'll also be interested to see what explanation Tom Follet gives for the row."

"Yes," said Bethancourt. "I'll be interested in that, too."

Marla was asleep. Bethancourt slipped out of the bed and stood a moment looking down at her. They had had another fight that evening when they had returned home to find a message from Gibbons on the machine and Bethancourt had insisted on ringing him back. They had made up, more or less, but she was sure to be sulky in the morning.

He turned and, wrapping a heavy silk robe about himself, crept from the room. In the study, he switched on the lamp and poured himself a scotch. He could not sleep. Cerberus, wakened by the absence of his master, padded quietly into the room and sat at Bethancourt's knee. Bethancourt fondled his ears and then picked up one of the police photos provided by

Gibbons. There was something wrong about this case. Gibbons had reported that the Follets were united in denying that Tom had had any kind of argument with his mother before her death. That could mean only one thing, but Bethancourt was at a loss to explain it. He stared at the photograph. It was all there: the body sprawled on the floor, obviously fallen from the stool; the handmirror and eyeliner compact to one side, the brush cast to the other side against the wall. The dressing table itself, otherwise undisturbed. The larger mirror on the wall, a small clock to one side of the table with the cup of coffee next to it, and a picture of the MacGruders in a silver gilt frame on the other side. In the space between lay a small bottle of foundation, two cases of eyeshadow, and a brown pencil, all set out in an orderly fashion.

Bethancourt sighed. There was something missing, he could feel it in his bones. But he could not think of what it was.

"Really," said Marla, "every time one of these cases comes along, you become totally preoccupied. It's worse than when you're writing. At least then you admit that you're preoccupied."

Bethancourt shifted uncomfortably behind the steering wheel. Marla had many virtues, but he had often had cause to wish that her temper was more restrained. He apologized, knowing it would do him no good, and it did not. She went on about his disgraceful behavior the evening before until he pulled up outside the studio where she was working that day. There was a parking space out front so he pulled into it and offered to come up for a few minutes—another conciliatory action and one which Marla accepted in better spirit. With Marla, actions spoke louder than words.

The studio was a bustle of activity. Marla was whisked away almost immediately to be fussed over by the fashion editor and the makeup man. Jim, the photographer, who knew and liked Bethancourt, found a few minutes to chat, but was then appealed to by several people to "come and look at this." Left alone, Bethancourt cast an eye over the clothes and accessories (hastily being arranged by the editor) to be shot, idly watched a harried assistant setting up another light, and finally wandered over to where Marla was having her face administered to by the makeup man.

"I may push off now," he an-

nounced. "What time shall I pick you up?"

Marla cast a jade green eye up at him, started to reply and was promptly hushed by the makeup man. Obediently, she closed her eyes and held a finger up to Bethancourt. The makeup man didn't spare him a glance. Expertly, he added color to Marla's lids, licked a finger to smudge the edges, smeared a line of color beneath her eyes, and turned momentarily back to his paraphernalia.

"I have to stop by the office tonight," said Marla. "How about meeting me there at six?"

"Six it is."

"Hold still," said the makeup man, taking her chin in one hand.

Marla touched a finger to her lips in the motion of blowing a kiss and then closed her eyes again. Bethancourt started to turn away and then paused to watch the makeup man draw the moistened brush along Marla's lashes, leaving a thin black line behind. He dunked the brush in a cup of water, dabbed it in the liner, and repeated the performance on the other eye.

Bethancourt forced himself to turn away, thinking, that's what Delia MacGruder was doing when someone came in and murdered her. She had

painted one line on her right eye and was about to do the left when she stopped. She stopped to eat or drink something someone handed her, and she died.

He proceeded to have coffee with his agent in an attempt to pacify the man, who was irate about deadlines and Bethancourt's failure to meet them. Bethancourt reflected that everyone was releasing their frustrations this morning by yelling at him. He went home, ostensibly to write an article, actually to sit in an armchair and stare out at nothing until the telephone rang.

"If she had a fight with her son, she didn't tell anybody," said Gibbons gloomily.

"Then maybe she didn't have one."

"But why would MacGruder lie?"

"Maybe he killed her. He did have the most to gain."

"Don't be silly, Phillip," said Gibbons, irritably. "He was playing golf with two other men when she died."

"That's true," said Bethancourt meditatively.

"I hate it when you're calm like this," said Gibbons. "Here I am, practically foaming at the mouth and you're sitting at home in perfect peace. Why is that?"

"Because you have ambition

and I don't," replied Bethancourt. "You have a job and you want to do it well and rise up through the ranks. Whereas I would like to be able to discover who killed Delia MacGruder, but if I don't, I figure someone like you will. It's true that you have to work for a living and I don't, but you enjoy your work and take pride in it, while I don't take pride in much of anything."

"That's not true, Phillip," said Gibbons. "What you do, you do very well. And you do and know about a lot more different things than I do. You just don't care particularly what anybody else thinks of you. I have to care. At least, I have to care what Carmichael thinks."

"How is he today?"

"Ready to roast me. Well, that's not entirely true. He did allow as how I had followed up all leads admirably, only he wants to know why they don't go anywhere. God knows I don't know why."

"I do," said Bethancourt. "I told you: we've got hold of the wrong angle somehow. Go back to the beginning, Jack. That's where we went wrong. There was something odd about the dressing room, and I'd give a hundred pounds if I could just remember what it was."

"So would I," said Gibbons, "and a hundred pounds is more

to me than it is to you. Look, I've got to go console Carmichael with today's agenda. Call me if you have any new thoughts."

"All right."

He hung up the receiver and found Cerberus at his side.

"Time for your walk, old fellow? All right, let me get my coat."

Cerberus followed him to the door in a dignified manner that managed to convey a discreet pleasure in the coming outing, but no particular anxiety. They were in the meadows of Hyde Park and were turning for home when the answer suddenly came to Bethancourt. He stopped dead and the dog looked round curiously at him. He saw with crystal clarity every minute action of the makeup man that morning. He saw the contorted face of the dead woman and the complete inventory of the dressing room. And he saw what was missing.

He took Cerberus home at a run. He hardly needed to consult the police photo for confirmation, but he did so anyway. Then, jubilant, anxious, full of the news, he dialed Scotland Yard. But Jack Gibbons was out to lunch.

Gibbons was enjoying the cottage pie in a pub two blocks from his office. His cohort, Chris O'Leary, was having sausage.

Between bites and sips of beer, they discussed the MacGruder murder and their superior's eccentricities. It was with some surprise, therefore, that Gibbons felt his shoulder taken in a strong grip and heard a familiar voice saying, "Jack! Thank God I've found you—I've been to three pubs already. Tell me—what did you take away from the dressing room?"

"Take away?" asked the detective in surprise, setting down his fork.

"Yes, yes," replied Bethancourt impatiently. "Take away, impound as evidence. The coffee, of course, but what else?"

"Oh." Understanding dawned. "Not much. Just the make up on the table—"

"Including the eyeliner?"

"Yes, that and the handmirror and the brush."

"Thank God!" Bethancourt sank down on a stool with relief.

"Look here, Phillip, what's this all about? Have you had an idea?"

"I've figured it out," Bethancourt announced, taking off his glasses and polishing them on his pants leg. "The cyanide was in the eyeliner."

Both Gibbons and O'Leary frowned. "But that's much slower," said Gibbons. "And I think it would have blinded her first—"

"No, no," broke in Bethancourt.

court. "You don't understand. That sort of eyeliner needs water to be applied. You have to wet the brush first. But there was no water on the dressing table. Therefore," he paused significantly, "she must have licked the brush to wet it. And the brush, of course, had cyanide all over it by then."

Back at Scotland Yard, Bethancourt repeated his explanation twice—once with pantomime—while the eyeliner was analyzed and found to contain cyanide.

"The eyeliner is bung full of it," said the chemist with satisfaction. "And the brush is covered, too. Only about twenty milligrams, but that's all it would take for someone as small as she was."

"That leaves little doubt," said Gibbons. "It had to be the husband. Who else would know that she habitually licked the brush?"

"That's a point," mused Bethancourt. "It will still be tough going in court. Any decent defense counsel will manage to explain why twenty other people would know."

"And would have the opportunity between one morning and the next?" said Gibbons.

"And it will be cinched if we can trace cyanide to his possession. We've not done much about

that—thinking, you see, since he had an alibi, there wasn't much use in it. We've a good chance of turning something up. After all, cyanide isn't an easy thing to get hold of."

"If you can do that, the case is sewn up. As it is, it's not bad—not with that motive tacked on."

Gibbons grinned. "You've been brilliant, Phillip. As usual."

"It came to me watching Marla being made up this morning," Bethancourt began and then he stopped with an anxious expression. "My God, what time is it?"

"Just on six."

"Lord!" Bethancourt leapt from his chair. "If I hurry I can manage being only ten minutes late. Damn rush hour traffic! No, bless it, I can tell her I got caught in a jam. Call you later, Jack. Come, Cerberus."

Gibbons, with an amused grin, watched his friend careen out the door and down the hall.

Some weeks later, Jack Gibbons shed his overcoat in Bethancourt's hallway and proceeded to the living room, where he was met by the agreeable sight of both Cerberus and Marla curled up together before a roaring fire.

"Whisky?" suggested Bethancourt, and Gibbons nodded and followed him to the bar.

"They got a conviction this afternoon, you know," said Gibbons in an undertone.

"I heard on the radio," said Bethancourt, pouring. "I wanted to be there, but Marla only just got back from that ski shoot this morning and she didn't want to go."

Gibbons glanced back at the girl beside the dog and at the

firelight glinting in her hair.

"They said on the radio the jury didn't take long."

"No, once we had traced the cyanide to his possession, it was pretty clear-cut. They were back inside of two hours."

"Then here's to us."

"We make a good team," nodded Gibbons, knocking his glass gently against Bethancourt's.

(continued from page 3)

ers in this issue to welcome, both of them with first stories. C. M. Chan, author of "The Dressing Table Murder," is a resident of Manhattan, a graduate of Bard College with a degree in theater, and a former resident of such nifty places as Paris, Edinburgh, London, and Crete. Mort Mason, author of "Two Person Lake," now resides in Florida but hails from Anchorage, is a commercial pilot and building designer, and in fact spent "thirty years as an

Alaska professional hunter (registered guide) and bush pilot." He "wrote for, and published, the first two issues of *Alaska Outdoors*"; he was also for a time an architect with a firm in Southeast Asia.

A final note: In "Blowup," Dick Stodghill introduces what we hope will be a new series, set in Akron, Ohio, in 1937. If you like this story, and we think you will, keep an eye out for the second one involving the same characters, "The Old Squad," coming up soon.

UNSOLVED

by
Mary Ellen Slate

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answers will appear in the November issue.

We offer this "homophone story" with apologies to Walter Mitty. Homophones are words that sound alike but differ in spelling and meaning, like knight/night, suite/sweet, and prints/prince. How many of the 141 pairs can you find in this tale?

Russell Wood, a nearly bald man of modest mien, wore clothes of worn serge and a tie with just the merest flecks of color. Unless you focused on his tie, he almost disappeared: His hair matched his face, which matched his suit—all grays.

Alone at his teller's cage, idle and bored, Russell took a peek at the frieze along the bank's ceiling. There was a knight, a minstrel with a lute, an urn, a lyre. Russell swayed on his feet and the room began to reel as he daydreamed.

Sir Claude de Bois reined his horse and rode at a slower gait. As the castle bell tolled, he saw the lord of the manor wave his sword at an empty metal coffer. "You vile villain, to steal my gold!" The weak serf cowered as the baron sent the steel weapon toward his heart. Sir Claude bawled, "Stop, by the Holy Rood! I am de Bois! I mete out justice and bring aid and succor to all men, howe'er base. Don't try my mettle or, rude coward, you'll be sealing your fate."

Suddenly through the grille of the cage came the hoarse bass voice of a constant cougher: "Freeze, sucker! Now, raise your hands. High."

Russell looked but saw no one.

"Didn't you hear me?" There was an edge of real pique verging

See page 148 for the solution to the September puzzle.

"Good Knight, Suite Prints." reprinted from Games Magazine. Copyright © 1983 by PSC Games Limited Partnership.

on choler in the rough voice. "Do as I told you."

"Do you mind, sir? I heard you but I can't see you," sighed Russell.

"Never mind the sighs, liar. Look down here. Damn! I'm losing patience."

The teller ducked his head and saw a vain, wee man only four feet high who paced up and down, stopping at intervals to flex his impressive arm muscles. He wore a T-shirt, a suede jacket, and bluejeans. Over his seamed forehead and apelike brows perched a wig, apparently tacked on with flour paste. His nose went straight for a bit, then took a sharp turn to the side. Yet Harry "Peewee" Farplotz, the world's smallest and most inept bank robber, had style. As he paced, a veil seemed to fall over Peewee's eyes.

Doctor Malcolm Farquahar stepped out of the hansom cab and paid his fare. "Another wholly daring feat accomplished for The Cause," he said as he flicked his ruff. None of his patients, indeed few in London, knew that the foppish medico was in fact a one-man-war-against-injustice in the guise of the Purple Pimpernel, master spy, who mined the terrorists of the French Revolution of their cache of francs.

During the instants that the pint-size hood mused, thoughts chased through Russell's mind. He was considering gambling on an act of derring-do when he saw Peewee's aide, a very broad broad, pointing a big black gun at him.

Rose "Mean Queen" Farplotz was as outsize as her husband was undersame. Her beet-red hair was tied in a messy knot. She wore a wrap of mangy furs masquerading as minks and a four-carat rhinestone ring. "Not well-bred," thought Russell, "but oddly handsome." And then she too fell into a daze.

Chaste Rosalind, the shepherdess, rowed on the incoming sea tide. She began to wade in with her pail of mussels, as behind her on the strait, the surge of the surf moved to the barren shore. The rays of the morning sun glinted from a vein of silver ore in a boulder. A lone tern wheeled. As Rosalind headed for her secret vale, she could sense its peace. The dew had disappeared and the mist had vanished, quiet as a nun. She heard the caws of crows as the flocks soared over the copse of yews; a sole hare started to browse. Near the fields of hay and rows of rye, a deer family—hart, doe, and half-grown fawn—stopped to graze. A bee buzzed over the furze.

Rosalind hugged her slim waist in delight as she inhaled the scent of phlox. She picked a flower and heard a rustle in the bushy

brake as a herd of sheep appeared, a woolly lamb gamboling beside each ewe. She passed by the stile, went through the gate, and bathed her feet in the crystal water of the tiny duct that led from the dam. She hummed a hymn for this balm to her soul.

Rose's return to reality was abrupt. "This doll could waste you," Peewee snarled. "She knows how to use that gun. Last week she blew away four guys. And," he held up a vial of pale liquid, "this is a bomb. So let's have the bread, the loot, the dough."

Russell stopped and weighed the situation as an uneasy silence reigned. Then he got out the cash box and threw it on the counter. "Take it. Be my guest, but the sum total is only eight hundred dollars and some cents."

Russell's eyes were drawn, as though by a magnet, to Rose's big gun, which was now held loosely at her side. He knew that the tough facade had cracked and he felt bolder. With a wry smile, he said, "I'm only a simple teller."

"Gimme a break," Peewee whined. "We didn't figure you for a real big-shot magnate like chairman of the board, for instance—not even a pipsqueak loan officer. You're nothing but—" There was an astonished pause. "But you're de Bois. I've seen you in my dreams."

By now Russell had also guessed Peewee's alter ego. "Hey! I know you too. Well, hi! You're my idol, the gallant Pimpernel, the prince of spies. And," he made a bow to Rose, "this minx, this belle, this fair maid would be Rosalind."

Russell stopped with a groan. "Oh, dear I owe you an apology. I pushed the alarm, and the police will be here soon."

"No need to fret, son, we'll beat the rap," said Peewee. "Not a penny has changed hands. Close the cash box and wipe off my prints. Then, just watch as Rosy eats her piece of hardware." Rose ate the gun, a creation made of a carrot dyed black.

"And now," said Peewee, "I'll just drink the liquid bomb and that ought to sew it up." He knocked back the tea that had posed as TNT.

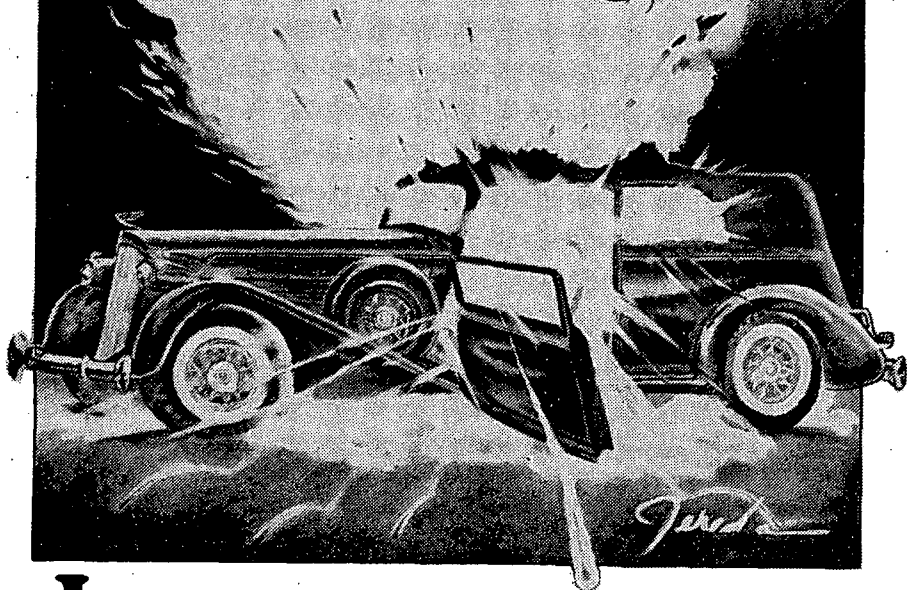
When the cops got there, they found a disappointing paucity of perpetrators; no villain to collar, no one to grill. "It was a false alarm, in a manner of speaking," Russell told them with tact.

The police made out their report while Rose started to coo at their fierce attack dogs, who wagged their tails, put their paws in her lap, gently clawed her furs, and licked her nose.

For the three new-found friends, the nonheist had been a coup. One night a week they would meet for a "Days of Yore" fête when they ate well and wine well, and told tales of the past.

Blowup

by Dick Stodghill



Jack Eddy drifted into our lives on the first warm day of spring. Drifted in along with the smell of rubber from the factory a block away. I probably wouldn't connect the two if Jack hadn't been such a fast mover, a man with wings on his feet. From that day on I'd think of him whenever I saw the familiar emblem high above the Goodyear complex.

It was late afternoon. I was stretched out on the couch in the living room, admiring my byline on page one of the *Times-Press*. It wasn't the big story of the day, the arrest of a gang that had terrorized a hundred diners at the Canteen restaurant and fled with four hundred dollars, but it was mine. Our readers, at least most of them, would skim it after first devouring the latest chitchat regarding Wallie Simpson and the duke.

The windows were open at the house on Dudley Street so I heard

the car and the slamming of the door when it stopped, then the sound of feet taking the porch steps two at a time.

Mrs. Bauer went by in the hallway, wiping her hands on the apron tied around her waist. She was without it only when attending early mass at the Church of the Annunciation or on Wednesday evening, dish night at the Norka Theater.

They talked quietly at the front door, leading me to believe it was only another bell-ringer with something to sell. Then Mrs. Bauer came into the living room, beckoning for the man to follow. The satisfaction shining from her eyes told me she had rented the room across the hall from mine.

"Bram," she said, "this is our new boarder, Mr. Eddy."

He wasn't tall, no more than five eleven. In his left hand he carried a worn suitcase the same shade of medium brown as his hair, which was lighter than the brown of his eyes. His smile came suddenly and it was friendly, yet at the same time held another quality I had seen before and recognized as determination, single-mindedness. After shaking hands I had to flex my fingers to get the feeling back again.

I said, "Abraham Geary, Mr. Eddy, but everybody calls me Bram."

"Make it Jack. What's your middle name, Lincoln?"

I admitted it was, a little sheepishly as usual. A name like mine is more than a man can hope to live up to.

"I've got supper on the stove, Bram," Mrs. Bauer said. "Would you mind taking Mr. Eddy—Jack—up to his room?"

It was the big room, the one I had been thinking about switching to since its previous occupant had moved out a week earlier. Habitually, I had delayed too long. This time it didn't matter; the big room was fifteen dollars and mine was only twelve. Thirty dollars a week wasn't bad money in 1937, but spending half my salary on room and board would have put a crimp in my social life. Not that it amounted to much; a movie once or twice a week, a ball game, an occasional date with one of the single girls at the newspaper. Never with the only girl I really wanted to be with because the thoughts in my mind never made it past my lips.

At dinner the women of the house were all aflutter over the new boarder. It surprised me because Jack Eddy wasn't what you'd consider handsome and he certainly wasn't a charmer. He was pleasant enough, but in a confident, forceful way that made you aware he would be the dominant figure in any gathering.

Pudgy Mabel Klosterman, who at twenty-five was about Jack

Eddy's age, seemed particularly smitten. Kitty Bauer, the daughter of the household and three years younger than Mabel, was going through her Myrna Loy stage at the time and pretended cool indifference. But by nature the lovely Kitty was more the Ginger Rogers type so her performance wasn't too convincing. Even Miss Ferrabee, who hadn't really warmed up to a man any time during her thirty-seven years, thawed a little in Jack Eddy's presence.

The smell of rubber lingered in the air when I walked out on the porch after dinner. The black grit from the three tall stacks at Goodyear crunched underfoot like rock salt. I stood a moment at the railing, admiring the Auburn sedan parked in front. It was larger and boxier than the newer models, yet in prime condition. When Jack Eddy joined me I said, "Nice car. Looks like you keep it in top shape."

"In my line of work I have to."

"What line's that?"

"A little of this, a little of that. I need a car that's dependable—and fast. So what do you drive?"

"A '32 Chevy. Dependable, sometimes, but it wouldn't keep up with an Auburn."

"I hear you're a newspaper reporter. Maybe you can help me out now and then."

"How?"

"Fill me in on things. I just got into town, so I don't know much about Akron except they build a lot of tires here."

I couldn't help smiling. "You nosed that out, did you?"

He stared a moment, then clapped me on the shoulder, grinning. "Not bad, Bram. Pretty funny. How about a beer to wash down the mashed potatoes? Come on, I'll drive."

"No need to. The Lenox Cafe's just around the corner."

We set out on foot, silent at first, walking briskly in air that had turned crisp when the sun went down. Then Jack Eddy said, "So tell me, who really runs this town? Who are the people a man should get to know?"

He came into the city room shortly after early deadline the next day. Until then it hadn't been an exciting one. The Akron bus drivers were still on strike, Firestone was on strike, the 5 & 10 clerks were on strike, rain was forecast—the same old news we had been running for days. But the barbers were planning to raise the price of haircuts to sixty-five cents, shaves to thirty-five, and that would raise a row.

I had filed my stories but hadn't had lunch, so we went across the street for a sandwich and a beer. When we were settled at a table Jack said, "Who would you go to in Akron if you wanted to plant a bomb in a car?"

It wasn't the kind of question that comes up in everyday conversation. I suppose I blinked a time or two before saying, "You wouldn't. You'd go to Youngstown, that's where you find the bombers."

I could see he wasn't ready to accept that as gospel, but he let it drop. "Okay. Can you give me a line on a man called Simon Lang?"

For a moment or so I studied him without replying. I had known other men who were intent, totally absorbed in what they were doing, but none quite like Jack Eddy. He seemed driven by some inner force that allowed for no distractions. At the same time, though, I sensed there was more to him than that. Had he been just another man consumed by greed or a desire to succeed, I would have given him short shrift. Instead I found myself being caught up in his enthusiasm.

"Look, Jack," I said, "I want to lend a hand, but don't you think I should be clued in on what you're doing? What are you, a G-Man . . . or a gangster?"

I think I expected him to hesitate or be evasive. Later I would know it wasn't his way. He said, "I'm an operative for Wellington's National Detective Agency. Transferred over from the Indianapolis branch, but that's not what I told Mrs. Bauer. The agency has a policy against putting people wise about what we do. She thinks I'm a salesman."

He took a sheet of paper from the inside pocket of his jacket, folded it so I could see only the lower half, then handed it to me. Even before reading it, I knew where I had come across the name of Simon Lang.

Shortly after eight the previous evening, a Constance Villedieu had parked her 1937 Cadillac, a sedan only a few months old, in the driveway of the home in Goodyear Heights she shared with an unmarried sister. Ten minutes later the car had blown up. Shortly after that the phone rang. When Villedieu lifted the receiver, a harsh voice said, "We missed this time, but we won't miss again." She told the police she had no idea who he was or what it was about.

I had read the same account several hours earlier in a report at the police station, then had written a few paragraphs on it. That

morning's Cleveland *Plain Dealer* had carried a story saying Villedieu was employed by Simon Lang. I had mentioned that, too, but went a step further by identifying Lang's place of business.

I handed him the assignment sheet. "The story doesn't ring true, Jack. Bombers don't miss, not in this part of the country. This Simon Lang runs an Oriental import business out on West Exchange Street."

"I know that. Can't you give me more?"

"No, but there's the man who can." I nodded to where Ted Leipsic was reading the first edition at a table beside the front window. "He's our business writer."

I called, "Hey, Ted," then motioned for him to join us.

Ted Leipsic was the dandy of the *Times-Press* staff, always dressed to the nines and never in need of a shave, a shine, or a pressing. It was his uniform, a necessity if he was to have access to the front offices at the rubber shops. Still, once beyond the fraternity key and his somewhat formal manner of speaking, Ted was much like any other reporter.

After he had brushed off a chair before sitting down, I repeated Jack Eddy's question. Ted's eyes narrowed as if I had asked what inside information he possessed on Stalin's purges in Russia. He moved his head to indicate Jack, but was looking at me when he said, "You know this gentleman?"

"Sure. He's a friend of mine."

"All right, then. Simon Lang imports merchandise from the Orient, mostly junk. He's made his real money exporting old street-car tracks to Japan so they can shoot them back at us someday. He's in tight with certain people of importance in Cleveland, namely Herman Sobieski and the other big shots in the Glenwood Gang. That adds credence to the rumor that he imports more than paper fans and Chinese gongs. Dope, in other words."

Ted glanced at his watch, then pushed back his chair and jumped up as if it were on fire. "I have to get going. Can't keep Harvey Firestone, Jr., waiting." The skepticism Jack Eddy felt was evident on his face. Even so, I could tell he was impressed.

"Did that do you any good?" I asked after Ted had left.

"A lot. I appreciate it."

"Where does Lang fit in?"

"He's the agency's client. The police said they'd send a car by the house whenever possible, but that's the best they can do. It isn't good enough, Lang wants a man inside."

"What do you make of it?"

"You're right about the story not stacking up. It was a message, that's all. Nobody was supposed to get hurt . . . this time. Somebody just touched a match to a stick or two of dynamite, then went to a phone and delivered the second half of the message."

"You think it was meant for Lang?"

"I don't know, I'm just getting started." He smiled from one side of his mouth, secretively, as if imparting inside information. "All I'm assigned to do is play bodyguard the next few nights, but I thought I'd do a little checking around. Lang told Casey, the agency manager, that nobody should have it in for him. He also told Casey there's no romance involved, so you can draw your own conclusions about everything he says."

He patted a bulge showing from under his jacket. "Where do the cops hang their hats? I have to tell them I'll be at the house, and that Casey assigned me a gun for this job."

As we were walking north on High Street toward the Central Police Station next to City Hall, Jack Eddy said, "Tell me, how many secretaries in Akron drive Cadillacs?"

I tapped on the door of his room the next morning, then turned the knob. The bed hadn't been slept in. I left for work wondering if I'd see him again before his nighttime assignment ended. It wasn't a surprise, though, when he came striding into the city room at noon as if he had been sent by Scripps-Howard headquarters to check out our operation.

"Have you been to bed?" I asked him.

"Sure, for four hours. Being the police reporter, you're acquainted with some shady characters who are in the know. Take me to see a couple."

"I'm on my way to Ptomaine Tommies for a hamburger. After that, maybe."

The wry smile that was a Jack Eddy trademark appeared. "You eat in a joint with a name like that?"

"The hamburgers are good. It's nothing fancy, though."

"I never would have guessed. Let's go, I'll bring you up to date along the way."

We walked west a block to Main, then north through the lunch-time crowd with Jack complaining about the stench of rubber. This time it was from the Goodrich plant bordering the south end of downtown. But thanks to the strike we didn't have the usual diesel fumes trailing behind a steady stream of boxy orange buses. I preferred rubber anytime.

I didn't know where his office was, so I asked.

"A few blocks ahead in the Metropolitan Building. Fifth floor, but it's against policy so don't show up there looking for me. Funny, but the Villedieu woman's ex-husband is staying a couple of doors north at the Howe Hotel. She told me they were divorced seven years ago and he's been out in California. Blew into town unexpectedly two weeks ago."

"Think he might be the bomber?"

"I haven't had a chance to check him out."

"How old are these people, anyway?"

"Him I don't know about. Villedieu's around thirty-five and Emma, the sister, looks ten years older. I haven't seen Lang, but Casey says he's fortyish."

"Anything doing last night?"

"Quiet as a mouse. Villedieu's a real knockout, though. High-class looking, but that's a fooler. She made it clear that if the night turned out to be boring, her bedroom door would be unlocked. Casey wouldn't care, but if the word got to the head office in New York I'd be job hunting."

"How about the sister's door?"

Jack's sideward glance implied it was a dumb question. "Not a chance. Anyway, she's a dried-up prune. Sat through the whole Fred Allen show without cracking a smile. At ten o'clock she dropped her knitting and said it was time to hit the hay. Villedieu jumped up like a puppet and followed her, but came back out in a sheer nightgown to tell me to fire up the coffee pot whenever I wanted and that she'd left a plate of cookies in the kitchen."

"And that guests were welcome in the bedroom? Do you think that meant just you or is she that way with everybody?"

He gave me another of his sardonic smiles. "Interested? Anyway, I couldn't tell. When I drove her to work this morning she seemed a little cool. Then when I asked if Emma ever leaves the house she got steamed."

"How'd you happen to ask that?"

"Just curious. The night before, she told me Emma keeps house but doesn't have an outside job and doesn't go in for socializing."

"So why did she get sore?"

"I think she was just waiting for an excuse. She said Emma never misses church, but she doesn't go herself. And Emma does volunteer work but she likes to get paid for whatever she does. I said it looks like she gets paid pretty well, and that didn't make a hit either."

Jack agreed the hamburgers at Ptomaine Tommies were good. He ate hurriedly, though, not really interested in food, eager to get on with business. I took time to exchange a few words with Tom Kennedy, my competitor on the police beat for the rival *Beacon Journal*, but skipped a second cup of coffee and took Jack down to a few of the Howard Street bars. At the third, a dingy place misnamed The Lighthouse, we found Dan Ruscinski. He was alone at a table making indecipherable marks on a scratch sheet listing the day's races. He nodded when I said hello, then, as we sat down, turned his attention to Jack.

Dan and I had been classmates through the eighth grade at Kent School. We had kept in touch, more or less. He was a rangy, sandy-haired man with pale blue eyes that seldom blinked and had a transparent quality that warned people away. He had been back in Akron several months after a few years at the Ohio State Penitentiary on an armed robbery conviction he claimed was a frame-up. There wasn't much Dan didn't know about after-dark activities in town.

He took my word for it that Jack Eddy was okay. It was a compliment from a man who rarely paid one verbally. We were all aware that a line existed and knew better than to go beyond it, but as long as we stuck to generalities, Dan was willing to talk with an old pal and his friend.

I had an idea what Jack wanted to know so I said, "They say a certain businessman on West Exchange is a drug supplier for some of the boys up in Cleveland. What do you think?"

"I think you're right, that's what they say."

"Any problems recently? I mean, is he in trouble?"

"No. Take my word for it, then lay off. Don't let the word get around that you're curious."

I could see Jack was impatient, but he played the game. "Somebody blew a car to smithereens a couple of nights ago. Heard anything about it?"

"Sure. Nobody knows from nothing. It's a cinch it wasn't tied up with the other thing we were talking about."

Jack nodded toward me. "Bram says you find the people who handle jobs like that in Youngstown. Is he right?"

"I never knew him to come out with something that wasn't." Dan turned to me, a lopsided grin that came close to being a leer adding a touch of menace to his features. "Remember the time in sixth grade somebody fingered me for throwing an egg on Miss Woodard's car?" He looked at Jack again. "Geary here knew who did it, so

with a little persuasion the guy went to the principal and said so. Till then they were set to expel me."

Jack pretended to be interested, but wasn't. He said, "Any word on somebody from Youngstown being here lately?"

It was apparent that Dan was growing tired of Jack Eddy's company. He hesitated after first shaking his head, then glanced at me again before saying, "One of the Scala brothers, I think it was Anton, was here a while, but strictly by accident. He bounced head-on off a truck out on Waterloo Road and put in a couple of weeks at Peoples Hospital. In other words, he wasn't on a job."

When we left I decided to put Jack through a test just to see how he would react. Rather than going on toward the *Times-Press* when we arrived at the Metropolitan Building, I turned in at the door:

"Wait a minute," he said, "you can't come in here."

"I thought you might want to talk to somebody higher up the ladder. Dan's just a mug."

"You mean *here*?"

I pressed the button for the elevator. "Not your floor, so quit stewing."

Thomas Mader's secretary was known as a tiger. Even Jack Eddy couldn't talk his way past her, but Mader heard the argument and opened the door of his private office. When he saw me, he nodded for us to come inside.

Mader was an independent insurance adjuster, if you believed the listing in the phone book. I knew he did enough of it to serve as a cover. Along with it, there were few lucrative rackets in town he didn't have a finger in. The police had enough to send him away for a hundred years, but nothing they could use in court.

We had exchanged information a number of times, so he trusted me enough to feel I wouldn't cross him up. I was smart enough not to do that with a reliable . . . After introducing Jack, I said, "Just one question, Mr. Mader. Simon Lang's dealings in streetcar tracks, have they got him in hot water with anybody?"

Mader, who dressed and looked like an elder statesman in the Taft administration but talked like a Chicago hood, said, "You mean the broad's car the other night? No tie-in. Lang keeps his nose clean, takes care of the right people. He's like that in everything. Selling tracks is all washed up, anyhow. The supply's about gone unless the big railroads go under, and that won't happen in a million years."

It backed up what Dan Ruscinski had told us. We separated at

the elevator, Jack having decided in favor of the stairs. As he started away I said, "Looks like Simon Lang was right. If anybody has it in for him it's got nothing to do with the underworld."

Without looking back Jack said, "Maybe," and kept going. As an afterthought he called, "Thanks for the help."

It was late the next afternoon before I saw him again. When I walked into the huge house built forty years earlier by a man with fourteen children, Mrs. Bauer hailed me from the kitchen.

"Supper's going to be a few minutes early, Bram. Jack has to work again tonight, and I want him to eat something substantial before he leaves."

After climbing the stairs, I knocked on his door. He told me to come in without asking who it was, so I was surprised to find him in only shorts and an undershirt. He was writing something at a small table he had fixed up as a desk, but slid whatever it was under a blotter. For an instant after he turned and saw it was me, I thought I detected a flicker of disappointment in his eyes.

"What line did you hand Mrs. Bauer?" I asked him.

"I told her my company's running an audit and working two shifts. Being new, I'm stuck with nights. I don't like using a pretext on her, but it's agency policy."

I wondered what other pretexts he might be using with residents of the house, but said, "Anything new?"

"Villedieu's ex-husband is in the clear. When he talked to her he neglected mentioning that he's got a new wife along with him. He's trying to sell some flea-brain idea to the different rubber companies, but he's not having any luck. I told him he should have checked into the Mayflower if he expected to make an impression on the men that count. He said he can't afford it, and it stands out all over him."

"Maybe blowing up the car is part of some scheme to get money out of his old flame."

"He hasn't got the guts."

"People fool you sometimes. How did it go last night?"

"Same old drag. I spent most of the evening alone with Emma. She got talkative for a change, gave me her opinion of men and the evil in the world. I turned up the radio but that didn't stop her."

"Where was Villedieu?"

"It was nearly ten when Lang brought her home. I heard the car

and took a look. They were really going at it in the front seat for a few minutes. More like a couple of animals than lovers, especially for people their age."

"Sure you're not jealous? Any more come-ons?"

For once Jack's laugh seemed genuine. "She didn't have the chance. Emma figured out what they were up to in the car and was hot about it. Villedieu was too busy trying to get back in her good graces to have time for anything else."

"Do you think all this might be a case of mistaken identity? Maybe the bomber got the wrong address."

Mrs. Bauer picked that moment to ring the dinner bell. Jack got up and started dressing without bothering to answer my question. Instead he winked at me, grinning as if to say he knew something I didn't.

There was good news in the morning; the barbers were leaving the price of haircuts at fifty cents. I was going through the overnight reports at the police station when the call came in of another car blowing up. After asking where it happened I hurried out to my car, then flooded the engine. I flagged a cab and arrived at the Castle Boulevard address as quickly as I could have by driving to the far west side myself. The street wasn't another Portage Path or Merriman Road where the rubber company executives lived in opulence, but none of the residents was suffering from the Depression.

This time it was the real thing, a professional job wired to go off when somebody turned on the ignition. I was certain beforehand who the victim would be, and was correct. The man who had died was Simon Lang.

A neighbor allowed me to use her telephone. It seemed to take forever for Mrs. Bauer to get Jack Eddy on the line. When I told him what had happened, he didn't say anything for a moment. I asked if he had heard me so he said, "Damn!" and then, after a pause, "How long will it take you to get here?"

"I'm not coming home. I have to get back downtown and write the story."

There was another silence. I was on the point of hanging up when he said, "You want to make it the whole story, don't you?"

I had planned to bum a ride back downtown, but luckily the cab driver had stayed around to watch. It was a long drive all the way across town, but he dropped me off at the house on Dudley Street in only twenty minutes. I called the city desk again and told Ben

Goldsmith, the city editor, not to worry, I'd be there in time to write the story. Mrs. Bauer was frantic to know what was going on, but I brushed on past her and out to where Jack was waiting in the Auburn.

We didn't have far to go; a block to Market Street, another to Goodyear Boulevard, past the baseball field to the hill leading to the Heights. Neither of us spoke until Jack pulled into the driveway of a commonplace brick two story on Tonawanda Avenue. After shutting off the motor he said, "I don't know if they've heard. Let me do the talking."

I didn't have to be told it was Emma who came to the door. She was just as Jack had described her, dried-up. The twist of her mouth made me feel she was mocking him, expressing her contempt. And there was nothing cordial in the way she said, "What do you want now? You can't talk to Constance. She's lying down, sedated."

It answered one question; they knew what had happened.

Jack could hold his own with anyone in being brusque. "It's you I want to see," he told her. "Not your little sister."

Her surprise was obvious. In a querulous tone she said, "Me? What could you have to say to me?"

"Let's go inside. Either that or out to my car."

She hesitated, then said, "Oh, come on in if you insist." She turned and walked away, quickly, as if anxious to get it over with. Jack was close behind. I followed them along a hallway to the kitchen, wondering why Emma hadn't questioned my presence, then deciding she must have taken me for another Wellington operative.

Jack poured two cups of coffee from a pot on the stove, handed one to me, and then sat down at a porcelain-top table. He looked to where Emma was standing in front of the sink, arms folded, lips pursed in distaste over our being there.

"Sit down," he told her.

"I'll stand, thank you."

"Have it your way. How many days a week did you say you do volunteer work at Peoples Hospital?"

"I didn't say. It's none of your business, but two."

"I made a big mistake about you, Emma. I had you pegged right, but didn't think you'd go ahead and have Lang killed."

She glared at him with angry eyes set deep in a face the color of putty. She tried to draw even farther away but the sink prevented it. In a throaty whisper she said, "You must be insane."

"Did you really think that blowing up your sister's car would

scare off Lang? That's as far as you intended going at first, wasn't it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"What changed your mind? It wasn't Lang's hiring the agency, so it must have been knowing they were necking out in the car the other night."

She glanced toward me, then away again so that she was facing a door opening onto a side porch. "I want you to leave. *Now.*"

Jack didn't move, or even indicate he had heard. "Your motive is obvious, and you grabbed your chance when you ran across Anton Scala in the hospital. You saw your cosy little setup slipping away if your sister married Lang. But they would have taken you in, wouldn't they?"

She swung around quickly, venomous now. "Taken me in! I've done my share, I don't have to be taken in by anybody. Now leave and don't come back."

From behind me a shaky voice said, "No, Emma."

I turned and saw the woman I knew had to be Constance Villedieu in the doorway. Her eyes were puffy from crying; mascara she hadn't bothered washing off mottled her cheeks. She said, "Is it true, Emma? Did you have Simon killed?"

Her sister gave a high-pitched, piercing laugh. "How can you even ask, Constance? Why would I do such a thing?"

"Because you *were* afraid we'd get married and you'd be left alone or have to move in with us. You've been harping about it for months. You *did* do it, didn't you?"

Emma, starting to edge her way toward the outside door, looked from her sister to Jack Eddy and back again. "Stop it, both of you."

Jack rose from his chair, stepping nearer to her. "The game's up, Emma. You might as well come clean."

She began shaking her head. "I told you to stop it. You're confusing me, going on this way."

"I should have known," Villedieu said. "I should have known that first night. You've always been sick, Emma."

"That's a lie. I'm *not* sick. I've never been sick." Her voice had risen until it was a shrill, bird-like cry. "But I could see what you were planning. Where would I have been? All I've done for you, Constance, and the only one you were thinking of was yourself."

Villedieu raised a hand to her mouth. "Oh, Emma . . ."

Jack turned and walked toward the hallway. "Keep an eye on things here, Bram. I have to make a phone call."

I hadn't expected another front page byline on the heels of the other. This time it was the banner story, two columns wide under a bold headline. It was an exciting day at the *Times-Press*, a rare and heady day when a reporter was witness to a confession of murder and all that came before and after. The *Beacon Journal*, for once badly beaten, carried only a bare-bones account of the bombing.

And yet I felt a vague dissatisfaction, a sense of having through no legitimate effort on my part been privy to occurrences outside my proper sphere. I knew it would be unfair to say I had been used, yet I couldn't shake the feeling that I had been skillfully led across the invisible line separating newsmen from publicity agents.

No one else seemed to share my uneasiness. And certainly Jack Eddy was deserving of the notoriety, the praise being heaped upon him. It was likely that the police would have reached the same conclusion in a day or two, but Jack had saved them considerable effort and eliminated any possibility that the truth might have gone undetected.

Once again Jack was the center of attention at dinner. Even crusty old Bus Bauer at the head of the table was impressed, pausing uncharacteristically in his eating to ask an occasional question. Only his wife seemed to have noticed my byline on the story. Mrs. Bauer said nothing, though, about having been deceived by her new boarder. But in recounting what had happened, Jack Eddy time and again built up the part I had played beyond what was warranted.

Immediately after dinner he left for a radio interview on WADC. Kitty Bauer, her Myrna Loy coyness long since forgotten, went with him in the dark brown Auburn. I was never quite sure how that had come about.

Still discontent, too restless to settle in front of the radio with the others, I checked the paper to see what was playing at the Norka and the Rialto, then decided that sitting in a theater would be no better than sitting in the living room. I went alone to the Lenox Cafe, left after one beer, and walked from store to store in the small business district known as East Akron. Only the bars were open, but I stood gazing at the lighted window displays even though winter had staged a comeback and the night was windy and raw.

A number of questions kept cropping up in my mind. I wondered if Kennedy was in hot water at the *Beacon Journal* for having been

scooped twice in one week. Above all I wondered what the publicity-shy detective agency would think about its newest operative's being on radio and the front page. Not only of both Akron newspapers but the *Canton Repository*, the *Youngstown Vindicator*, the three dailies in Cleveland.

I wasn't long in finding out. The next day Jack Eddy called at deadline with an invitation to lunch. We met at Kraker's Old Heidelberg, a rathskeller I visited only when certain that someone else would be picking up the check. At every corner along the way seedy-looking men held up the first edition of the *Beacon Journal* while crying out its headline: "Wallie divorced, duke speeds to her."

It amazed me, yet didn't really surprise me; people were more interested in that than in Roosevelt's approving a ten million dollar WPA program that would mean four thousand jobs for Akron.

Lunch turned out to be a celebration; Wellington's had promoted Jack to assistant manager. There would be little change in his duties, but a private office and ten dollars more in his pay envelope every week.

I thought of asking how Kitty Bauer had happened to go with him the previous evening, and where they had been between leaving the radio studio and arriving home shortly before midnight. I didn't, of course.

But I knew that life had changed, and that the change would be permanent. There was no way of knowing what lay ahead, yet I was certain there would be adventurous moments. And despite all my reservations and misgivings, the prospect left me a little excited. But from that point on, I decided, my role would be strictly that of observer.

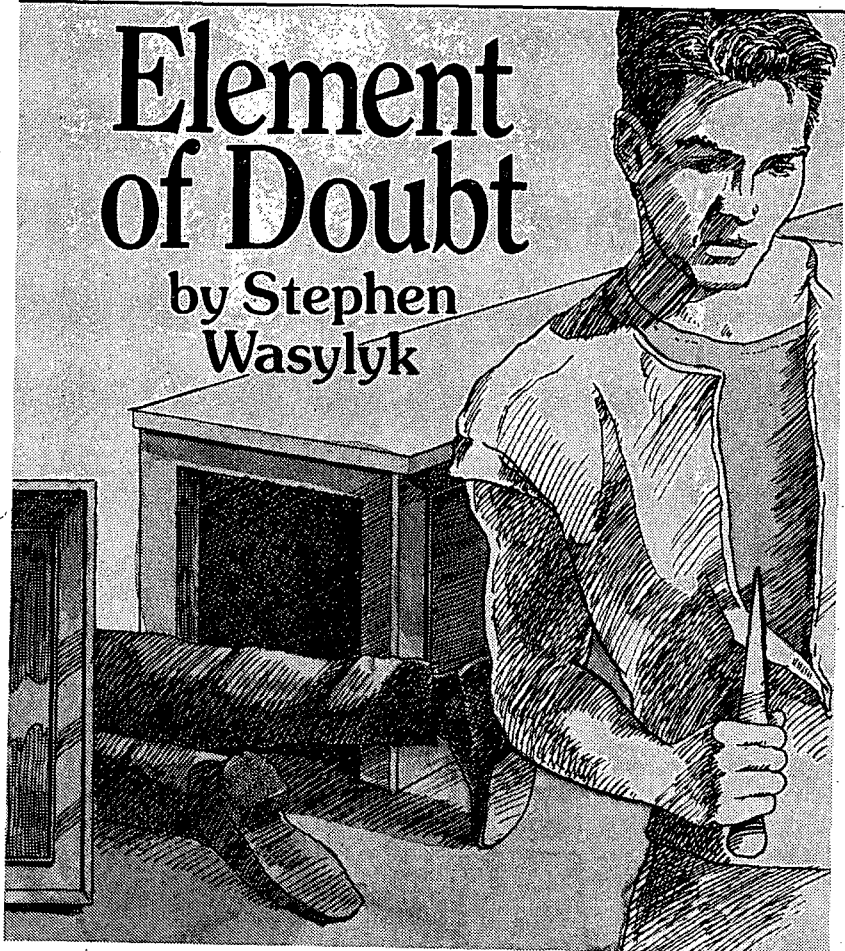
My thoughts drifted to Constance Villedieu and her sister Emma, and to dark-eyed, vivacious Kitty Bauer, women who a week earlier hadn't known Jack Eddy existed but whose lives were forever changed by his arrival in town.

I returned abruptly to the present, jarred back to reality by Jack's saying, "What can you tell me about the murder of a man named Novatny in front of a club on South Arlington street last summer?"

He was leaning toward me, eyes fixed intently on mine. I poured the last of the beer from a brown Burkhardt's bottle, wondering what new development he was onto. Remembering that I wasn't going to let myself be manipulated again, I hesitated a moment before replying. Then, as if listening to someone else speak, I heard myself saying, "It was during the Olympics in Berlin. Jesse Owens is from Cleveland, so everybody was excited and . . ."

Element of Doubt

by Stephen
Wasylyk



Not quite finished, held together by clamps, the mahogany mantel clock case on Barney's workbench didn't please him at all. He couldn't put his finger on what was wrong. Proportion. Base too high. Top too large. Nothing leaped out at him.

That was the hazard of creating something. You were never quite sure it would work exactly the way you saw it in your mind. The only standard you could measure against existed in your imagination and you couldn't translate a feeling into inches.

Brown eyes fixed on the door, John Henry suddenly lifted his glossy, black-coated hundred pounds from the floor, tail wagging in anticipation.

Damn. He didn't need a visitor right now. Barney refused to turn to see who it was.

"Edna said we'd find you out here, Barney."

He looked at the tan summer uniform out of the corner of his eye. "You run out of coffee at the station, Corcoran?"

"Pay him no mind," said Corcoran over his shoulder. "I told you he was a crotchety old goat but once you get to know him, you'll love him."

The man behind Corcoran was half-bald, heavy-set, wearing a dark blue pinstripe and carrying a briefcase.

"Mort Higgins, Barney. He's the attorney for Joe Jarret."

Higgins picked his way carefully through the aisle between the bench and band saws. The fine dust that filmed everything in Barney's shop could put that pinstripe in the dry cleaner's very quickly.

He had a good, firm handshake and steady eyes. "Corcoran suggested you might be able to help us."

"Let's step outside before you sue me for a new suit," said Barney.

His garage, like the others on the street, was about fifty feet behind his home at the head of

the driveway alongside the house, its south wall reflecting the heat of the sun into Edna's flower garden where she was expertly dispatching assorted insects with a hand-held sprayer.

John Henry settled his rear end on Corcoran's shoes, a maneuver calculated to get attention.

Corcoran scratched the dog's ears. "You know we arrested Joe Jarret for killing his father?"

"So the paper said. From what I read, Higgins here won't have much of a defense."

"We're probably the only two in the county who believe he's innocent."

"So prove it. Isn't that part of your job?"

"I've spent so much time trying to do that, the chief is threatening me with traffic duty. I can't find a thing that will help the kid. Neither can Mort."

"What makes you think he didn't do it?"

"He says he wouldn't, couldn't, and didn't, and we believe him."

"Why come to me? I'm not Sherlock Holmes."

Edna joined them. "If you were, you and that violin would be gone."

"Unfortunately, neither am I," Corcoran said, "and the county detectives say they have enough to do without wasting time on something so cut and

dried, so I was thinking. Jarret made custom furniture and you fool around making clocks—”

“Hey,” said Barney. “Fool around?”

“You know what I mean. He had this business, two people working for him, but it’s still woodworking, right? Do me a favor. Come over to his shop and look around. You know more about that stuff than we do, and you might come up with something we overlooked.”

“What in the hell kind of connection is that? The fact that he was a cabinet maker might have nothing to do with the murder, and if it did, the men who worked for him might be of more help. Ask them.”

“Hold it, Barney. Since we don’t know who killed him, working with those two might be the wrong thing to do, even if we’re fairly sure they’re in the clear. They’re too close to it. Besides, I always liked the way your mind operates—”

“I’ve always considered it somewhat peculiar myself.” Edna smiled. “Oh, go ahead, Barney. It won’t cost you anything but time. Besides, murder stories always have a mysterious beautiful blonde lurking about. Maybe you’ll run into one.”

“You’re thinking of spy stories, but if I do, both of us are off to Acapulco on the evening plane.”

“Stop by on your way to the airport. I’ll pack a lunch for you. Those airline meals are terrible.”

Corcoran cleared his throat. “What do you say, Barney? The kid needs help.”

“That kid has needed help since he was ten.”

“The fact that he’s been in and out of trouble for years doesn’t mean he’s guilty,” said Higgins quietly.

Maybe stepping away from that clock and coming back to it later would help.

Barney pointed a stern finger at John Henry. “You stay.” The finger swung to Edna. “And don’t feed him any goodies while I’m gone. He’s putting on weight.”

“I thought so.” Corcoran wiggled his foot out from beneath John Henry’s rump. “My toes went numb faster than usual.”

“You drive over,” Barney told him. “Mort and I will walk and talk.”

As they started up the tree-lined street, Higgins said, “I apologize for intruding on your time—”

“No intrusion,” said Barney. “My problem is wondering how I can possibly help. Exactly what went on?”

“The boy and his father have been at odds ever since his mother died and that may be at the bottom of his trouble, but we’re not concerned with that

now. He went to work for his father after high school but wasn't much good. He'd discovered that drinking could numb whatever was bothering him and was on his way to becoming an alcoholic, showing up drunk if he showed up at all, which led to some pretty wild arguments with his father. Last week, according to the people who saw him, he zigzagged up the street and into the shop. The two employees were out delivering a piece of furniture, so that meant he and his father were alone. Immediately after he entered, Santoro, who runs a dry cleaning shop next door, heard yelling. He decided to take a look. He saw Joe standing there, holding a long-handled wood chisel of some sort, and Jarret's shoes projecting from behind the counter. He called the police. Joe was still there when they arrived, the chisel stained with blood, his father dead at his feet. No one else in the shop, but the boy says he didn't do it."

"Was he in any condition to know?"

"Not really. He was floating on an alcoholic cloud somewhere. But he says no matter how far gone he was, he'd never have killed his father. Corcoran and I believe him."

"Who else would have a motive?"

"That's problem number two. Jarret has been feuding with

the people around the shop for years who object to the noise of the machinery and the odors when he was finishing a piece of furniture, but he had a long-term lease and there wasn't much they could do about it. They might have objected to his presence, but it is inconceivable they would murder to get him out. Furthermore, it appears impossible for anyone else to have been there. Santoro was out front and the back door was locked. You can't enter, but you can leave. Corcoran talked to the people who live on the other side of the back alley. None saw anything unusual, like a stranger or someone running at the time of the murder."

Up ahead, Corcoran's car was already parked in front of a row of small shops, the street changing abruptly from residential to commercial as it approached a major intersection.

Sandwiched between the dry cleaner and the optometrist, Jarret's shop featured a handsome chest on chest in lustrous walnut in its plate glass window, the ornate brass drawer pulls gleaming. Whatever else he'd been, Jarret had been a craftsman.

Corcoran unlocked the door and ushered them inside. A waist-high oak counter with a hinged gate at one end extended across the room.

The sergeant pointed at a

chalked outline on the vinyl tiled floor just inside the gate.

"We found him here. The kid was standing on the other side of the gate as though he had started to go in and Jarret tried to stop him."

Barney turned to Higgins. "You said something about a long-handled wood chisel."

Higgins handed him an eight by ten photograph from his briefcase.

Barney studied it for a moment. The elongated hourglass shape of the handle was more than half the length, the steel shank thin and pointed in a V shape.

"How long is it?"

Corcoran held his hands about ten inches apart.

"It isn't a wood chisel," said Barney. "It's a small parting tool used on a wood lathe."

"What difference does that make?" asked Corcoran.

"Possibly none, but if you're going to describe the murder weapon, get it right."

Higgins nodded. "Good point, Barney."

"I suppose you checked for fingerprints?"

"Only Joe's were clear."

Barney stepped through the gate. A desk with a chair alongside was pushed up to the counter. On the other side, two shelves held a row of supply house catalogues and several books on furniture, propped up

by a small box holding samples of hardwoods. Farther back was a small drawing board with a dust cover of plastic, and a row of filing cabinets.

Drawn along the desktop, his index finger left a streak in the fine film of dust that lay over everything, just as in his shop.

He stepped into the shop itself through the door at the rear of the office. One wall had lengths of hardwood lumber carefully laid flat and identified, sheets of veneer alongside. The machinery was arranged with ample clearance. One corner was taken up by a booth about ten feet square, the door marked KEEP CLOSED AT ALL TIMES. He didn't have to look inside to know it was the finishing booth, equipped with ventilating fans and filters and sealed off from the shop to keep dust out.

He picked up a wood chisel from a workbench and held it alongside the photo. "This is the difference, Mort. The chisel has a shorter handle, and the flat end is designed to be tapped with a hammer or mallet."

"I still don't see that it makes a difference," said Corcoran.

"Corcoran, sometimes you're smarter than you think. You asked me to come over because you thought I might help. You were right. I've already told you the right name for the murder weapon and I'm going to ask

you something I've been asking myself. How in the hell did it get into the office? The boy couldn't have been carrying it."

"Jarret must have had it in his hand—"

"And the boy took it from him and stabbed him? But you said he was innocent."

Corcoran threw up his hands. "You've got me confused now."

Higgins grinned. "Keep going, Barney. All I need is a strong element of doubt, and you've already given me part of it."

Barney walked to a wood lathe in the corner. Still locked in position was a half-finished length of maple, destined to match three table legs finished in a traditional country style already standing beside the lathe, the half-finished piece no more than scrap now because of a deep, splintered gash in the smooth, graceful taper which could never be repaired. Alongside, a flat, compartmented tray held a set of sturdy, long-handled gouges with various tips, and four small ones. One compartment was empty and obviously had held the small tool in the photograph.

He handed the print to Higgins. "You can see where this tool came from, but something is wrong here." He traced a forefinger down the gash in the ruined leg. "This had to have happened when Jarret was working on it, but it wasn't be-

cause the tool got away from him. It looks as though the gouge was jammed into the workpiece because someone bumped him. Now maybe it happened while his two employees were here, but I doubt it because he'd have pulled it out immediately." Barney smiled. "Personally, I'd have used it as a club on whoever caused it. Furthermore, he wasn't using the murder weapon. It isn't designed for what he was doing. He'd have been using one of the large gouges to work on that taper. So the question still is—how did that tool get to the office? I'm beginning to think it went out there sticking in Jarret's chest. Did you just assume he was killed there or did you check it out?"

"We didn't check anything because we had no reason to think Jarret was killed anywhere else. Be impossible to prove now."

"Maybe not. Has the shop been closed since the murder?"

"I locked it up myself."

"Get that big flashlight you carry in your car."

Higgins placed a hand on Barney's shoulder. "I can see Corcoran was right to ask for your help. It simply never occurred to either of us to speculate why the tool was where it was."

"Don't give him any credit

yet. We still don't know anything."

"I'm not concerned. I don't have to prove the boy innocent. I just have to create a reasonable doubt, and I don't have enough now to put up a good fight."

"You'd have trouble with me if I was on the jury. Speculation up against the boy's record, his fighting with his father, and finding him with the tool in his hand wouldn't cut much ice in the jury room."

"Perhaps, but look at it this way. Suppose the boy came in, saw the body, and not realizing what he was doing because he was drunk, pulled the tool out of his father's chest. Instead of sobering him up, the shock of seeing his father dead turned his mind blank. The jury would have to give that some thought."

Corcoran returned with the flashlight.

Barney turned it on, set it on the floor near the counter, went to the door of the shop, and peered back along the fan of light.

He shook his head. "Forget it. Jarret's machinery is equipped with dust collectors, but some always escapes. You can see it everywhere. I was hoping the floor would show streaks where the body was dragged, but it looks as though the Russian army passed through."

He shrugged. "I guess that's

about as far as I can go."

"That's a great deal farther than we managed to get." Higgins turned to Corcoran. "I assume you have things to do and so have I. Let's let this churn overnight. Maybe we can come up with something more tomorrow."

"If Jarret was dragged across that dusty floor," said Corcoran slowly, "wouldn't his clothes show that?"

"Worth a try," said Barney. "Have them check the back, because he couldn't very well have been dragged face down. Just remember, his clothing would have dust in it just from working. And check with his two men to see when that leg was ruined."

Parked before the site of a murder, Corcoran's car had drawn a half dozen people waiting to see if they could learn something new.

A short, dark-haired man stepped forward, his voice booming. "What's going on, Corcoran?"

"None of your business, Santoro."

Santoro waved at the others. "What goes on with this shop is the business of all of us. We've been trying to get rid of it for a long time. Now the man is dead and his shop is *poof*. We have to be sure the zoning board doesn't let anything like that open again."

Corcoran's voice was laced with distaste. "You don't have to crow about the man's death, Santoro."

"Crow? What do you mean crow?" Santoro's voice boomed louder. "We didn't want him dead. We were very reasonable about the whole thing, but not him. No. He was just stubborn. Didn't Ochs and me go out of our way to find him another place he could move to? Offer to help him get out of his lease because I would take over the space and the real estate people would lose nothing? Hell, he didn't even thank us. Just told us to get out. So don't expect me to shed tears, Corcoran. We tried to be good neighbors."

Higgins touched Corcoran's arm. "Let's go. We don't have time for arguments."

Corcoran nodded. "Give you a lift, Barney?"

"No, thanks. The neighbors will think the old fool is in trouble again."

As the car pulled away, Santoro stepped in front of Barney. "Who are you?"

For a man in business, Santoro didn't come across as the most pleasant person in the world. He was the aggressive type, always pushing himself to the front as though he might miss something.

"Sherlock Holmes," said Barney.

The tall man standing beside

Santoro chuckled. "He's right, Santoro. That's none of our business."

"How do you know, Ochs? Maybe he's going to buy the place and we don't get rid of it after all."

So the tall man was the optometrist. Ochs had a way of leaning forward, as though he wanted to mask his height, and looking out from beneath shaggy eyebrows with pleasant brown eyes; a complete contrast to the loud Santoro.

"Just why didn't you want Jarret's shop here?" asked Barney.

"It simply didn't belong," said Ochs. "Constant noise. That damned dust filtering through everywhere. You can't get rid of it because of the way the building is constructed." He indicated his optometrist's sign. "My equipment is precise and expensive. I lived with a camel's hair brush in my hand because you can't examine people's eyes and fit them with glasses properly when everything is covered with a film of dust a half hour after you clean it. Everyone had complaints. Trucks blocking the alley, odors on a cloudy, windless day. And not just the shop owners. The people who live across the back alley felt the same way. You're not really considering buying the business, are you?"

"You said it," said Barney.

"Who I am and what I'm doing here is no concern of yours."

The others had drifted away when Corcoran's car departed so that only the two of them were left to stare after him as he headed home.

John Henry saw him coming and rushed to escort him the rest of the way, bouncing around him as though he'd been gone for days.

Edna was rinsing her sprayer. "Find the mysterious, beautiful blonde?"

"Yeah, but she's holding out for an eccentric millionaire."

"In that case she's not only mysterious and beautiful but smart."

"Not really. Anyone who would turn me down for an eccentric millionaire can't be too intelligent."

The clock case still looked wrong. Pacing from side to side, he studied it. In his corner, John Henry lay with his head flat between his paws, his eyes following him.

One little thing was throwing it out of kilter. Like the Jarret murder. Something was out of balance there, too, and he couldn't put his finger on that, either.

"Tell you what, John Henry. We'll make the top a quarter inch smaller all around and route the edge a little deeper to give it more finesse. If it doesn't work, we lose a couple of hours

and a nice piece of mahogany."

He set up his bench saw and flicked the switch, the rising whine of the blade driving John Henry and his sensitive ears out in stiff-legged dignity.

The moment he set the new top in place and stepped back, he grunted with satisfaction. That had been it. Nothing offended that aesthetic image now, and standing there pleased with himself, he realized what was missing in the Jarret killing. A motive.

They could speculate about where Jarret had been killed until hell froze over and it wouldn't help Higgins establish his element of doubt because supposedly the son was the only person who wanted him dead.

His motive could be hate, but no one could really pin that down. Because he and his father fought didn't mean they didn't love each other. It might even mean they did.

What was left? Rage. Someone losing his temper, snatching up the turning tool and thrusting it into Jarret's chest. In his shop next door, Santoro had heard yelling.

Greed. Someone who wanted something that Jarret had or would benefit from his death. The shop? It was of no value to anyone except another cabinet maker. The business? Jarret's skill and reputation weren't transferable and used machin-

ery and tools were available everywhere. The people around him would benefit from his death, but as Higgins had said, that wasn't enough to kill over.

If Higgins didn't come up with a reason why someone else wanted Jarret dead, he wasn't going to get far with a jury.

He flicked off the light, closed the door behind him, and looked down at John Henry waiting patiently for him to emerge.

"Want to talk?"

The dog's ears rose, eyes expectant and waiting for Barney's first step, and he was ten feet ahead when they passed Edna.

"Where are you off to now?"

"Going to give the blonde the opportunity to change her mind."

"If she does, don't forget to stop by for the lunch."

As they approached Jarret's shop and the heavier traffic, Barney snapped his fingers at the dog. "Heel." John Henry obediently trotted into position.

The alley that ran in the rear of the row of shops right-angled to emerge alongside Santoro's shop. Barney followed it around to find a solid yellow wall of brick down one side; hedges and fences on the other separating back yards that could be duplicated a hundred times within a square mile: seedy back yards, well-tended back yards, yards with flower gardens and lush

green lawns, yards with vegetable gardens with plants sagging with ripening tomatoes.

An elderly woman, hair white beneath a wide-brimmed straw hat, was using a hoe without much enthusiasm.

Barney leaned on the gate. "Good afternoon."

She seemed grateful for the interruption. "Good afternoon."

"Your garden seems to be doing well."

She came to the gate; a square-faced woman with high cheekbones and a thin nose who stood straight, head high.

"I really don't know why I keep on. Habit, I suppose. Before my husband passed away, we worked on it together."

"I'm sorry. When did he die?"

Her eyes looked up the alley. "Last summer, but it seems as though it was yesterday."

It would always seem as though it was yesterday.

Her eyes settled on John Henry. "Handsome brute. What's his name?"

"John Henry."

"Suits him." She leaned over the gate and stroked his head, John Henry probably wondering why she took so long to get around to it.

"Waiting for someone?"

"In a way," said Barney. "I suppose you know about Mr. Jarret."

"Wasn't that terrible? His own son."

"Were you here that day?"

She smiled wryly. "Where would I go? I was working in the garden when I heard the sirens. I thought there had been another accident at the intersection. I had no idea of what had really happened until the police sergeant came around asking if any of us had seen anything unusual. I told him I'd seen nothing but what I always see when I'm out here."

"Which is?"

"Oh, the people from the shops who use the rear doors, children using the alley as a shortcut. Even the trash truck making its usual weekly pickup from the dumpster all of the shops use. My, that thing makes a racket. I could never understand why my neighbors complained about the noise from Mr. Jarret's shop and not about that."

Barney turned. The dumpster was behind him. To pick it up, the trash truck would have stopped behind Jarret's shop and, looming big only ten or fifteen feet from her in the alley, would have blocked her view of the rear of the shops for almost the length of the building.

"They do make a great deal of noise," he said. "I suppose if it had been here at the right time, you'd never have heard the sirens at all."

"That's true, but it left shortly before."

Barney held his breath. "Did you tell the sergeant that?"

"He didn't ask. As I told you, he seemed to be more interested in knowing if I'd seen anything unusual."

Corcoran had been looking for a specific answer and, not finding it and in a hurry, had gone his way. And the woman had been answering questions, not chatting as she was with him, so she'd volunteered nothing.

Bored now that she was no longer petting him, John Henry's pleading eyes were on Barney, telling him it was time to leave.

Barney smiled. "Been nice talking to you." He thought of the lonely eyes looking down the alley and he knew her husband had often come home that way. "My wife and I sometimes take a walk in the afternoon. If you're out here working, we'll stop by and talk for a few minutes."

Her eyes softened as though he'd given her a gift. "As I said, where would I go? My tomatoes will be nice and ripe in a few more days. Perhaps you can help me out by taking a few."

"That would be a pleasure. Nothing like a home-grown tomato. The ones in the supermarkets taste like paper."

"My husband used to say the same thing."

John Henry fell in at his heel.

"Make a note, John Henry," said Barney. "The next time Corcoran comes around, it's all right with me if you nibble on him a little. He wanted something to help him prove Joe Jarret might not have killed his father, but he knew damned well I'd get no peace until I knew what really happened in that shop. He's using me, John Henry, taking advantage of a bald-headed, fat old retiree. What do you think of that?"

Trotting along on bedspring legs, head up, ears raised, John Henry had picked up the scent of a cat in the vicinity, quivering in anticipation of the chase but held at Barney's side because he hadn't been released from that heel command.

"I know exactly how you feel," said Barney, "but I don't know who to go after."

He snapped his fingers. John Henry was off like a shot.

Corcoran called late that afternoon.

"I'll swear, Barney, I can be in this business for two hundred years and I'll never understand why people decide for themselves what is important to tell you. Jarret's men knew nothing about that damaged leg. Said it must have happened after they left, but one of them casually, casually mind you, suggested I ask Santoro and Ochs if they knew anything because

they were with Jarret when they left. When I asked why he hadn't told me that before, he said Santoro and Ochs were always talking to Jarret and he didn't think it was important. Can you imagine that?"

"I can imagine," said Barney. "The woman who lives across the alley told you the trash truck had been there, but she didn't mention it was there right before you arrived. How about the wood dust on Jarret's clothing?"

"Won't know until tomorrow, but I think I'd better talk to those two now. Like to come along?"

"Does John Henry like to chase cats?"

Corcoran asked Santoro and Ochs to step into Jarret's workshop, both protesting against being taken away from their businesses.

"One of Jarret's men said you were both here with him when they drove off," said Corcoran. "Mind telling me why?"

"As usual, we were trying to talk him into leaving," said Santoro. "He was just as stubborn as ever, so we left."

Barney flipped a lever and removed the damaged leg from the wood lathe. He pointed to the gash. "Were you here when this happened?"

Ochs was looking at everything in the shop except the leg.

"No," said Santoro. "Exactly what do you want from us?"

"Just trying to determine how Jarret was killed," said Barney.

"I thought that was settled." Ochs' eyes were still wandering. "His son stabbed him with one of his tools. Who are you, anyway?"

Fear. He hadn't considered fear as a motive.

"Corcoran should have told you. I'm a psychic. One of those people with extra-sensory perception who can sense what happened when they visit the scene of a crime by picking up the vibrations remaining in the time spectrum."

Corcoran blinked.

"That's it," said Santoro. "I don't know why you brought this flake here, Corcoran, but I'm leaving."

Barney winked at Corcoran. "Let me explain. Time passes, but it doesn't cease to exist. The invisible shock waves of an event remain, particularly when the space-time continuum remains undisturbed. I'm sure you've both read of ancient tombs being opened and the feeling of the men who found them of being transported back in time because the aura locked within the crypt is so strong. That is true of this shop. It's been locked since Jarret was killed and the vibrations haven't faded at all." Santoro and Ochs stared at him.

Barney closed his eyes and slowly ran one hand down the damaged leg, his voice a flat monotone. "Let me tell you what I see. I see two men arguing with Jarret. One is short, the other is tall. Jarret turns his back and goes back to work. The short man becomes angry. He grabs Jarret's shoulder, throwing him off balance and causing the tool he was using to damage the leg he was working on. Jarret is furious. He spins."

"I think the guy is drunk, Corcoran," said Santoro.

Barney's monotone continued. "Jarret had spent several hours working down that leg. Now it is ruined. But there is more than just a loss of time. Like an artist who has seen his painting slashed, he has seen his work destroyed. He strikes the short man and whirls on the other."

Ochs' face was white, his voice a whisper. "Good Lord."

"The tall man steps back, his eyes on that sharp, heavy tool in Jarret's hands. He feels—he feels—" Barney shook his head. "There is confusion here. I can't—I—" He grasped the leg in both hands and raised it above his head, his voice becoming louder. "Yes! Yes! I can see it now! He is certain that Jarret is going to kill him! He snatches up a tool and strikes out with it! Jarret falls. *He's*

killed him! The two men stare at each other. Neither wanted him dead, but they can't undo what has happened. They decide to cover it up. They carry him to the front office to make it appear he was killed there. No one sees them leave by the back door because the trash truck is making a pickup. Several minutes later, the short man sees Joe Jarret come up the street and enter the shop. Knowing what he'll find, he calls the police and says he's heard angry yelling, goes to the door, and sees Joe Jarret standing there with the weapon in his hand."

His face was still white, but Ochs had regained his composure. "Is this some sort of *avant garde* police procedure, Corcoran? There is no proof of anything this man says. Certainly it will not stand up in a court of law."

Barney opened his eyes. "You're right, but now that the sergeant knows what happened, he can go about proving it. The newspaper story said Jarret had been killed with a wood chisel because that's what Corcoran told the reporter. There was no reason for anyone to think anything else. But you called it a tool even though you had never seen it. Why?"

Ochs glanced at Santoro. "A chisel is a tool."

"So is a hammer, but if the

paper had said Jarret had been killed with one, you'd have said hammer. You said tool because you knew exactly what had been used. And Corcoran will check for fingerprints on Jarret's gouges. I'm sure you didn't consider those when you replaced the one he had been using. It will be interesting to hear an explanation because neither of you had a reason, any reason, to handle one of Jarret's tools."

"I've had enough," said Santoro. "I'm leaving."

"Go ahead," said Corcoran, "but don't go too far. I'll be looking for you after I talk with the men who operate that trash truck. One of them had to see you two leave."

Ochs made a muffled sound and covered his face with his hands. "I told you, Santoro. We should have reported it. It was an accident, but no, you said, we'd both be ruined. What are we now?"

"Keep your mouth shut."

"You heard the psychic. He could have been here." He lowered his hands, appeal in his eyes. "I swear, Corcoran, I wouldn't have let Joe Jarret go to trial."

"Just hope the district attorney believes you," said Corcoran.

Lustrous with a coat of stain, the clock case stood on Barney's

workbench, showing the promise of the rich finish to come.

"John Henry," said Barney, "we just might get the hang of this yet."

John Henry raised his head and trotted toward the door, tail wagging. Barney followed him into the twilight.

Corcoran and Higgins were talking to Edna.

Higgins came forward, hand outstretched. "I wanted to express my appreciation personally, Barney. All I was looking for was an element of doubt, but you wiped out the case against my client completely."

Corcoran grinned. "What I want to know is where you got that crazy psychic act. That was pretty impressive, Barney."

"Since we had no evidence, it was the only thing I could think of to keep them from knowing I was just guessing."

"You should get an Academy Award. Ochs still thinks you're for real."

"That's because of his guilty conscience."

"But how did you know he was the one who stabbed Jarret?"

"All you have to do is look at them. Ochs is a gentle man. He

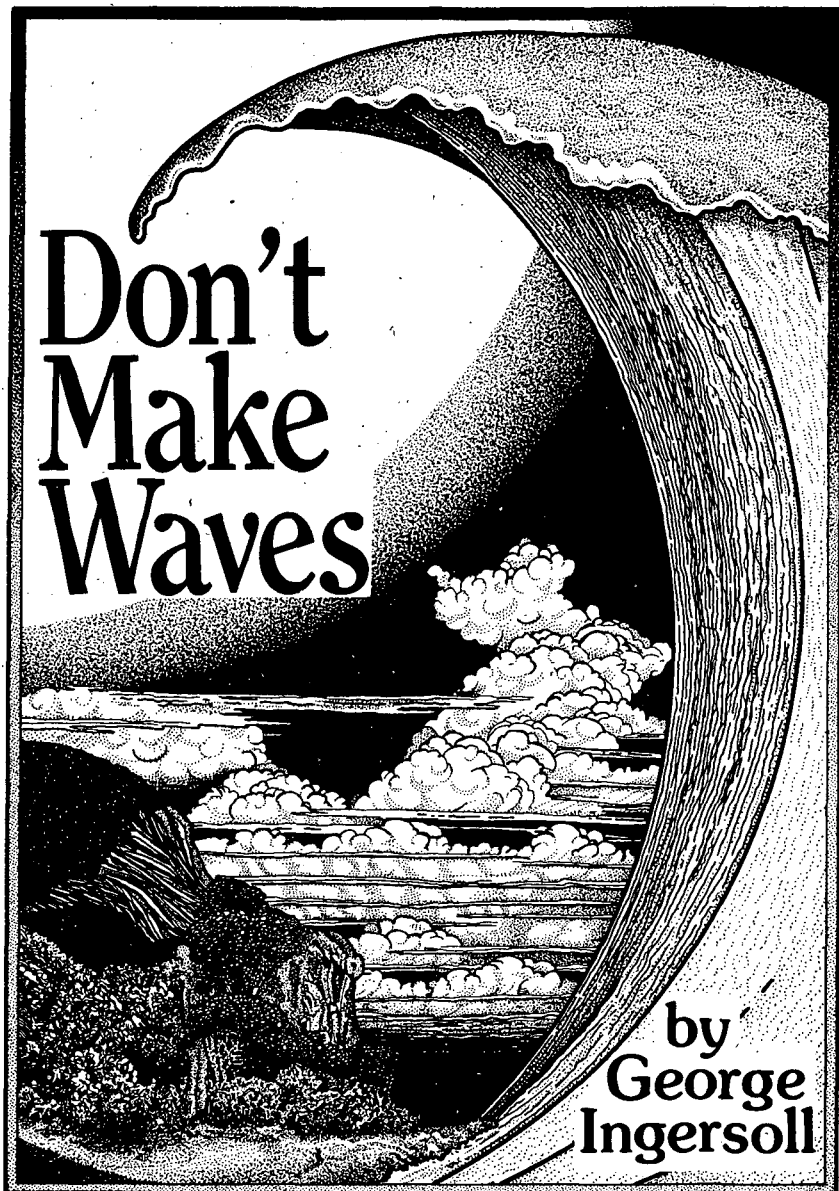
would have never grabbed Jarret when he turned away from him, but Santoro is a don't-you-dare-turn-your-back-on-me type. On the other hand, Santoro wouldn't have reached for a weapon when threatened. Ochs would. He's no fist fighter. As a matter of fact, he's no fighter at all. I would bet that Jarret practically ran himself into that tool."

"You never run out of surprises. That's exactly what he told the D.A. Are you sure you're not really psychic?"

"He's just peculiar," said Edna. "Now if a mysterious, beautiful blonde had been involved, his day would be complete."

Barney snorted. "The blonde was your idea, not mine. As far as I'm concerned, I did pretty well. I have the offer of some nice, fresh, home-grown tomatoes, and anyone with any experience with mysterious, beautiful blondes will tell you that's a better deal. Tomatoes give you far less indigestion."

He looked down at John Henry. "Get off Higgins' foot, dummy. Don't you know better than to give a lawyer an excuse for a lawsuit?"



Hardy was a sombre fellow, not to say downright morbid, but verbose. He didn't cut a prepossessing figure. In late middle age, his appearance would make a barber laugh and a dry cleaner cry, but he had one blessed attribute: Hardy had tenure. He kept this priceless fact stowed away, to be pulled out and examined now and then, like a wino surreptitiously peeling back the bag to assure himself that the jug was still half full. Hardy taught math at a respectable New England college, and with tenure, they couldn't bigod lay him off unless the entire institution went belly-up. With no wife or family to trouble him, his modest salary and the income from his equally modest investments were all he needed. To look at him, nobody would have picked Hardy out of a crowd as the one to trigger the most awesome cataclysm in historic times.

He was surely not regarded as Mr. Chips by his students, but his verbosity was prized. If one could just manage to get him going, he was likely to go on for a whole class about something or other, and maybe even forget assignments. This was infinitely preferable to being zapped with calculus. And so it turned out on the final day of spring semester. The atmosphere was charged; the students were as Indy 500 drivers, rounding the final turn, pace car left behind, awaiting the green flag, release from constraints. It was all but over; exams complete, scores known, freedom thirty minutes away. Teaching and learning were equally impossible, and a sophomore unleashed Hardy's verbosity with a carefully crafted, seemingly innocent question.

He stood with his back to the windows, hands on hips, and glared around the room.

"Here I am. I try to teach. There you are. A few of you try to learn. A lot of you seem to think mainly of sex and cars. A few of you, I believe, don't think at all. And yet, out there beyond those lovely old elms, away from this sequestered campus, there are five or six billion people, all milling around, doing all of the inspiring and unspeakable things they've always done, and do you know what?"

He glared around again. "They're doing all those things like so many mindless bacteria on a shingle!

"You, who consider yourselves dedicated environmentalists . . . think upon how poorly this planet is assembled. A skin, thinner in proportion than the shell of an egg, separating us from the white hot magma below, and even this eggshell is flawed. All

cracked into a lot of plates, floating around on that magma like so many shingles in a bathtub, nudging each other, and every shingle crawling with us microbes. And the lousy shingles are porous. Just let one of those pores ooze a bit of pus from below and the microbes have Krakatoa . . . Vesuvius . . . Mt. St. Helens.

"You children play at your nuclear protest movements, and well you might. If my colleagues in the physics department were to put together a big enough fusion device and detonate it at the right juncture of a few of those shingles, the microbes could quit worrying about fallout. Penetrate to that magma and let the oceans in, and it would be all over for this planet in less than two minutes. It would come apart like a fragmentation grenade, shingles, bacteria, and all."

Hardy paused, then went on, uncharacteristically quietly.

"Most of you passed. Don't thank me. You've only slogged through the Slough of Despond . . . differential calculus. From here the road gets steeper and more rocky. If any of you ever make it to the mathematical summit and elect to put your knowledge to work examining our shingle, you surely won't thank me. Who enjoys living under the Damoclean Sword?"

He checked his watch.

"Only fifteen minutes to go. Close enough. This class is over. Enjoy your summer." He spoke this last to a lot of rapidly receding backs.

Hardy went to the windows and stood watching as the trickle of departing students became a stream, then a torrent, pouring from every building on campus. "Someone must have sprayed behind the baseboards," he muttered sourly. The clamor and vroom-vroom of eighteen hundred vigorous kids eager to be gone is considerable, and masked the ever-so-faint tremble of the old floor beneath Hardy's feet. That's how it began.

The shingle called the Atlantic plate had shifted ever so slightly, like an old dog twitching in its sleep. The twitch didn't deserve the name earthquake, merely a minor redistribution of stresses. An observer on the shoreline might have noticed a brief period of unusual wave activity, but none did. It went unnoticed except by a few readers of seismograph charts, who noted it routinely and forgot it. It stirred up a little mud from the ocean floor and dislodged from the ooze a curious greenish flask which had lain, covered, for millennia.

That was all.

When the zoo beneath the windows had subsided a bit, Hardy followed his students at a more leisurely pace. His car, gassed up and ready, awaited him in the faculty parking lot. While the kids were mainly speeding south, he would be heading east, to the coast. While they were fornicating in the sweaty nexus of Florida beaches, he would be enjoying the austere solitude he preferred. No wet T-shirt contests for Hardy. In two hours' time he would be crossing the bridge onto Cape Cod. Another hour, east then north, and he would arrive at the simple beach cottage which had been his inheritance, perched high on the lip of the great gaunt bluffs, looking out onto the Atlantic. As he drove he wondered what damage the winter storms had done this year, and how much of his little holding had yielded to the inevitable march of erosion.

Hardy was on schedule when he crossed the boundary of the National Seashore, approaching his cottage. "Only smart thing the bureaucrats ever did was to save this place from the developers," he grumbled. He followed the blacktop road, with its neat National Park Service traffic signs, to the familiar branch, swung left, and drove around the RESIDENTS ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT proclamation. He was on a part of the seashore legally accessible only to those who'd owned property there (or their heirs or assigns) at the time the area had become a national park. The bureaucrats at whom Hardy sneered did their best to assure the privacy of these folks.

Hardy talked to himself with increasing frequency these days. "If I had my way they'd take down that silly sign and replace it with a good high chain link fence with razor wire on the top." Among the hordes of summer visitors were always a few who, innocently or otherwise, violated the private lands. Hardy was usually the first to call the ranger station and scream. He was relieved to find his cottage intact, and that he'd only lost two feet of his back yard to the sea over the winter.

It was two mornings later that Hardy found the flask. He'd spent the day after his arrival taking down the plywood over the windows, turning on the water, and generally making the place livable. On this day he would get to do what he really wanted: walk the great beach in the early morning. Tourists seldom came this far up the beach from the public area, but if he got out early enough, he could usually avoid even the ones who did. In defiance of park regulations to stay off the faces of the high, steep bluffs,

Hardy half-climbed, half-slid down over the convoluted clay and sand and landed on the beach amid his own little avalanche. He chose to walk north.

He very nearly missed seeing the flask; its dark greenish color blended with the patches of kelp that dotted the shore. He prodded it disdainfully with his toe. "More litter . . . damn kids . . . probably a beer bottle." But it wasn't. Curious, he picked it up. Too small for a beer bottle. Opaque. He wasn't even certain it was glass. Odd stopper, too . . . looked like lead, with some nearly-obliterated design stamped into the surface. Perfume? Too large for that. Some exotic liqueur, drifted ashore from a yacht? He shook it; it felt empty.

Hardy got out the absurdly large lock-back knife he carried in a belt sheath and attacked the stopper. It *was* lead, and solidly driven in. The stopper fought him, then suddenly yielded, as though pushed from within. He thought he heard a slight hiss and saw a tiny transient puff of vapor. Something had been released. He sniffed cautiously and smelled only a faint mustiness. He inverted the flask, but nothing ran out. He tossed the flask and stopper back onto the sand and trudged on.

Hardy was neither an antiquarian nor a scholar, only a mediocre math teacher. He had little imagination, and had never in his life read anything fanciful. He had no idea what he'd held, nor what he'd released. He may have remembered childhood legends of the Djinn, with their infernal powers, and how recalcitrant Djinn could be imprisoned in tiny flasks, and so rendered harmless, by the might of the seal placed upon the stopper. Invariably, the ancient wisdom holds, if the Djinn is released by the seal's removal, the liberator is rewarded by the granting of wishes. If Hardy did remember this, he certainly never connected it with the bit of flotsam he'd discarded. He was surely oblivious to the tiny breath of tenuous mist moving behind him.

His innate perversity had, that morning, taken the form of a mild crankiness at his inability to find anything to complain about. He gazed sourly at the flawless blue sky and virgin beach of late spring. Then he focused on the tiny, benign wavelets patting the sand gently. "Typical, for this time of year," he grunted. "Little six inch waves that go on and on. I'd like to see one big wave, just to break the monotony, but just one. More, and we'd be swarmed over by screaming surfers." It was as close to being a frivolous thought as Hardy ever generated. It wasn't heard by anyone; he was alone, except for a wisp of mist.

As Hardy spoke, a curious phenomenon began. Far out at sea two waves met and merged their masses into one. This was unusual behavior in an area of opposing wind and current, where the norm was a confused chop. Then another added its mass . . . and another. The process had begun. All day it continued, unobserved by man, and by nightfall, the process was complete. The mass of bearded gray-white water had formed and begun to move on its course, accelerating. The course? Due west. At the speed of an airplane.

Considering the vastness of the sea, it was minuscule. It was no larger than Vermont, and its plateau was only two hundred feet above the surface of the surrounding sea. A mere solitary scout, dispatched by the forces of the oceans to probe the alertness of the land's outposts.

At the following dawn Hardy strode to his accustomed vantage point on the lip of the eastern bluffs and stared below him. He grunted his surprise. The tide was far lower than ever in his experience. Rank after rank of sand bars marched outward from the beach for, he judged, half a mile. Clouds of gulls were feeding voraciously on fish trapped in the pools between the bars. Lunch, thought Hardy, and ran to the cottage for his spinning rod. He was bracing for his scramble down the bluffs when an inexplicable sense of unease impelled him to stop and survey the horizon. Unease escalated to premonition when he saw, far out to sea, a dark cloudbank rising, stretching in both directions to the limits of his vision. "Freak spring storm?" Spinning rod forgotten, he watched. The cloudbank seemed to be advancing rapidly, which Hardy thought odd; what breeze there was was offshore.

It came on with uncanny speed, silently, climbing until it obscured the dawn sun. He began to feel the edges of fear. This was unnatural. Then, at once, he was transfixed. Belief lags comprehension when one is confronted with the unbelievable. Unbelief dissolved into sheer animal terror. A white fleck in the face of the cloudbank had come into focus for what it was . . . the eighty foot hull of an ocean-going trawler, tumbling like a bathtub toy. The cloudbank had revealed itself in an instant as a supernal wave-front, a sheer cliff of water higher than Niagara, advancing as inevitably as time itself. No man had ever seen such a tsunami, and Hardy faced it alone.

The wave would roll over Cape Cod, impeded no more than by a child's sand castle. A pilot on approach to Hyannis would see, and scream into his radio. A radio ham on the heights west of

Hyannis would see, with one minute's margin. He would put out an immediate and hysterical mayday. Both would be heard, and neither would be heeded. Nantucket would vanish, and the gingerbread houses of Martha's Vineyard would be drowned for all time. Slowed, now, by the rising of the sea bed, its speed would drop to seventy-five miles per hour when reaching landfall on the mainland at Onset. There would be no time for warning and escape.

The water would move inexorably inland, slowing as it went, as its incalculable energy would be sapped by the forces of the land which men called friction and gravity. It would finally stop, one hour and fifteen minutes after Hardy's demise, when the water was ankle-deep in the streets of Providence.

It would lie still briefly, exhausted, then begin its retreat. The ultimate, terrible, ever-accelerating outwash would begin, scouring a new face upon the land, and carrying with it all life and most of the recognizable works of man east of a line from Boston to Point Judith.

The loss in lives would, of course, never be accurately known. It would be estimated at five million. No rigorous attempt would ever be made to estimate the loss in treasure. The search for answers would begin even as the waters receded, but none would ever be found.

Hardy was never to know any of this. He lay on the lip of the bluffs, curled into foetal position, awaiting the wave. Poor fool, he never knew he had two more wishes due him.

Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

Tit, Tat, Tutt

by Arthur Train



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

133

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Ephraim Tutt, on his annual fishing trip to the Mohawk Valley, dropped off the train at Pottsville one early May morning to find the station deserted.

"What's happened to this town?" he demanded of the station agent. "Where's the taxi-man?"

"Up to the courthouse with all the rest of the folks. Want me to help ye?"

"No, thanks," answered the old lawyer, "I guess I can manage to toddle as far as the Phoenix Hotel."

So Mr. Tutt, with an ancient leather rod case under each arm, and carrying a valise in either hand, staggered across the village square. Although only half after nine o'clock, the crowd milling around the Brick Block resembled that on Fair Day. As he reached the courthouse, a motor drew to the curb beside him and a young woman, accompanied by a decrepit old man, got out. Though Mr. Tutt knew most of the local inhabitants, he did not recognize her—one of those new summer people, he decided, from Rochester or Utica, probably. Certainly she was unusual both in looks and distinction. Mr. Tutt liked dark girls, especially trim girls with black curly mops and eager eyes, like this one. A girl of spirit, evidently, and in any event, whether native or imported, an acquisition to Pottsville.

Arriving exhausted at the Phoenix Hotel, where he was affectionately greeted by Ma Best, he sensed at once that the old lady had something on her mind.

"What's happened?" he inquired, dumping his paraphernalia on the rickety piazza. "Has anyone dynamited the bank? Or has Squire Mason been up to his old tricks?"

"I'll say he has!" she fumed. "Wait till you've swallowed your vittles, an' I'll give you an earful about him."

Mr. Tutt, who was hungry, followed her into the little dining room and obediently "swallowed his vittles," as ordered.

"Now," he said, lighting a stogie, "unfold your harrowing tale."

Ma seated herself in the chair at the end of the table. "Remember Judge Gamage?"

"Sure! Married the late Mrs. Tarleton, didn't he? I thought he was Pottsville's leading citizen."

"Leading scalawag! You knew her daughter by her first husband, Dorothy Tarleton? . . . No? Well, I guess she always was away at boarding school when you were here. She's just about the sweetest and prettiest girl in town. How she ever could abide that old potato

bag for a stepfather, I never did see! Anyhow, she fell in love with Dr. Alan Kellogg, a young surgeon that moved here last summer. A fine fellow he was, and doin' well, too. Her mother was on her deathbed at the time, but when Dorothy and Alan told her they were engaged, it bucked her up considerable and she give 'em her blessing an' said as how at last she could die in peace."

"A pleasant romance," nodded Mr. Tutt. "Where does Squire Mason bob up?"

"Right now! No sooner had Dorothy's mother died and her will been probated than it appeared Squire Mason had pulled a more-than-ordinary fast one. Mrs. Gamage had signed her will when she first got ill, long before she knew that Dorothy and Alan were interested in each other. Mason had put it away in his strongbox and, naturally, she'd forgot all about it."

"What was in it?" asked Mr. Tutt, with interest.

"That's what I'm goin' to tell you. It seems the Squire and Gamage had from the very start been tryin' to wangle things so that she would leave the judge all her property, but while she'd been willin' to give Gamage her money, she wanted the homestead to go to Dorothy, because it had belonged to her father. Mason had done his best to persuade her out of it, but she wouldn't budge. So the sly old fox pretended he thought she was quite right, but suggested that Dorothy—without her mother's guidance—ought to be protected against makin' an improper marriage. Said some rascally fortune hunter might marry her and get it! So he induced her—after he'd writ in the clause leavin' the homestead to Dorothy—to let him put in another providin' that, if she married before she was twenty-five without her stepfather's consent, the property should go to him."

"Well, what was the harm in that?"

"Harm!" snorted Ma, kicking the table leg in her wrath. "Why, not satisfied with gettin' a lot of money for nuthin', and in spite of his knowin' that his dead wife had approved of Dorothy's marryin' Dr. Kellogg, that old rascal, Gamage, refused to give his consent. He was her guardian under the will, with full charge of her property, and he wouldn't even let Alan come into the house. So there was nuthin' fer 'em to do but to run away."

"And the girl, knowing the consequences, was satisfied to sacrifice her inheritance?"

"Sure! She wasn't goin' to wait any six years!"

"More power to her!" commented Mr. Tutt. "And then?"

"So she wrote the judge a letter tellin' him what she thought of him, and her and Alan motored over to Canajoharie and got married."

"And the judge claimed the homestead, as forfeited to him under his wife's will?"

"You've said it!" assented Ma. "Up to that time, most of us had liked the judge well enough, albeit we figured he'd done pretty well for himself, marryin' the Widow Tarleton, but now we woke up to what he really was. And then came the toughest break of all. Alan got sick and was ordered to Arizona. He had to give up his practice; they spent all the money he'd saved, and Gamage—the old skin-flint!—wouldn't turn a hand to help them. Of course, if Dorothy hadn't married Alan, she'd own the homestead and could raise money on mortgage, but, as it is, the bank—it's Mason's bank, at that!—won't lend her a cent. An' now some realty company has offered the judge fifty thousand dollars for it, provided he can give 'em a clear title, and he's brought an action to have the court declare that the place belongs to him. The town is all het up about it. The case is goin' to be tried this very mornin' down to the courthouse, before Judge Tompkins."

"What does Mrs. Kellogg look like?"

"She's dark and slim and has beautiful eyes. You'd love her."

Mr. Tutt allowed the smoke of his stogie to eddy slowly from his nostrils.

"Has she got a lawyer?"

"Only sort of. Of course, she couldn't afford to pay a reg'lar fee, but old Mr. Lecky, from Patterson Corners, has offered to defend her. Do you think she's got any chance?"

"Not if she acted with her eyes open."

"Well, she did! She had it out with her stepfather over and over again. The hull town knew about it."

"Then, in my opinion, she hasn't got a leg to stand on," replied Mr. Tutt, pushing back his chair.

"Where are you goin'?" asked Ma anxiously.

"I had intended to go fishing," answered the old man. "But after what you've told me, I think I'll wander over to the courthouse instead."

The judge had just gone on the bench when Mr. Tutt succeeded in working his way through the throng inside the courtroom to the rail. The entire countryside had turned out to see the legal melodrama in which Judge Gamage was playing Dr. Jekyll and Mr.

Hyde. The parties and their respective lawyers were already in their places—brick-cheeked Squire Mason opposite the jury box, beside a flabby Buddhalike man with a vacant, pasty face and no eyebrows; Dorothy Tarleton—whom Mr. Tutt instantly recognized—at the adjoining table with her counsel, Mr. Lecky, a mild-mannered, asthmatic octogenarian, who had been a friend of her father's.

"Gamage versus Kellogg," called the clerk.

The courtroom hushed and Squire Mason stood up.

"If Your Honor please," he began pompously, "this is an action for a declaratory judgment of forfeiture under the will of the late Louisa Gamage, who devised her two-hundred-acre estate, together with the house and buildings thereon, to her daughter, then Dorothy Tarleton, now Dorothy Kellogg, provided, however, that the latter should not marry before she reached the age of twenty-five years without her stepfather's—my client's—consent, in which case the property should go to him. There is no dispute whatsoever as to the facts. At nineteen years of age the defendant did marry, not only without the consent of the plaintiff, her legally appointed guardian, but in absolute defiance of his wishes. In fact, she eloped. That's all there is to the case. I have here certified copies of the will and marriage certificate, also an original letter to the plaintiff in the defendant's handwriting, which she left behind her. I offer them all in evidence."

"Any objection?" inquired Judge Tompkins.

"No, Your Honor," said Mr. Lecky. "There is no dispute as to the facts. Squire Mason has stated them quite correctly. My client, Mrs. Kellogg, did marry before she was twenty-five without her stepfather's consent."

"What, then, is your defense, counselor?"

The old man tottered to his feet.

"Our claim," he wheezed, "is that the condition in her mother's will limiting my client's right to marry is void as against public policy."

"A pure question of law?"

"Purely a question of law."

"In that case," suggested Tompkins, "why should not both parties stipulate on the record that the facts are as stated by counsel for the plaintiff?"

"That is satisfactory to me," replied Mr. Lecky.

The judge nodded to the stenographer.

"Note the stipulation, Mr. Grady," he directed. . . . "Now, counselor, why do you say that the testatrix couldn't legally make the provision in question?"

"Because the law has always frowned upon limitations upon the right to marry as against public policy," declared Mr. Lecky stoutly.

"Pardon me," interposed Mason, "but such conditions have repeatedly been held valid in this state. Your Honor is, of course, familiar with *Hogan versus Curtin*, 88 New York 171."

Dorothy looked up anxiously at her aged champion.

"*Hogan versus Curtin* does not apply," answered Mr. Lecky, "for the simple reason that there the condition against marriage was limited to twenty-one years. Since, at the time that case was decided, a woman could not legally marry under twenty-one in any event, no additional limitation was placed by the will upon her right to marry. Now, if, in the present instance, the testatrix had been content to provide that her daughter must secure her guardian's consent to marry merely before she became of age or else forfeit her property, I concede that the clause would have been a proper one. When, however, she sought to extend the period to twenty-five years, she went too far. To attempt to limit the defendant's freedom to marry after her majority is unreasonable, and hence void."

Judge Tompkins peered over his spectacles at Mason.

"How about it, counselor?"

The squire, with a complacent grin, lifted a volume of reports from the table before him.

"The question of minority or majority doesn't come into it!" he asserted triumphantly. "In the English case of *Yonge versus Furze*, 8 D. M. & G. 766, it was held that a precisely similar condition against a person marrying under the age of twenty-eight was valid."

Mr. Tutt's heart sank beneath his waistcoat. His sympathies were already enlisted upon the side of the dark-haired girl, who had tossed her future over the wall to marry for love.

"Is that so?" exclaimed Tompkins, reaching for the book. "H'm! That would seem to settle it, unless Mr. Lecky has some other authorities."

Mr. Lecky shook his head.

"I have none. But in view of Your Honor's attitude, I should like to have the plaintiff take the stand for a moment."

"I object," answered Mason. "The facts in the case have been conceded. Both sides have so stipulated."

Tompkins hesitated.

"I am inclined to agree. However, I'll hear what Mr. Lecky wants to ask. Let the plaintiff be sworn."

A murmur of hostility ran along the benches as Gamage seated himself in the witness chair. His hairless baby face was as inscrutable as that of a poker player who holds four aces.

"Mr. Gamage," said Mr. Lecky, "please tell the court your reasons for refusing to give your consent to my client's marriage."

Squire Mason shot up:

"I object. The plaintiff's reasons for his refusal are wholly irrelevant."

Several boos came from the crowd in the rear.

Judge Tompkins pounded angrily with his gavel.

"If I hear anything like that again, I shall clear the room!" he said severely. . . . "Mr. Lecky, I don't see what difference it makes what the plaintiff's reasons may have been. I exclude the question as irrelevant."

"Very well," plaintively replied Mr. Lecky. "Then I will make an offer of proof. I propose to show from this witness's own lips that long after his wife, a dying woman, had executed her will, she learned of her daughter's engagement to Dr. Kellogg and gave it her approval. In spite of which, and for the sole and obvious purpose of securing the estate for himself, the witness deliberately declined to honor his wife's wishes and refused the consent which she had, in fact, already given."

A chorus of jeers and catcalls burst from the remoter spectators.

"Order! Order in the court!" shouted Sheriff Higgins, pounding on the rail.

Judge Tompkins stood up.

"I decline to receive the evidence offered and I give the defendant an exception to my refusal. . . . Sheriff Higgins, clear the room! The court will take a recess for ten minutes."

He stalked out, his robe bellying behind him. Mr. Tutt picked up his stovepipe hat and followed to the judicial chamber.

"Well, Eph," remarked the judge, pacing up and down, "there seems to be an all-fired lot of feeling about this case. What's your opinion about it?"

"That Gamage and Mason are a pair of first-class crooks."

"Looks that way," admitted His Honor, accepting a stogie from his friend. "Between them, they've got that girl hog-tied. It's an outrage, but I guess I'll have to render judgment for the plaintiff."

"I'm afraid you'll have to. Mason apparently has the law on his

side. There doesn't seem any way out of it—at least for the moment."

Judge Tompkins peered searchingly at the old lawyer.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing in particular. But I've a firm conviction that, in a situation so manifestly inequitable, justice is bound to triumph in the end," replied Mr. Tutt earnestly. "I've got a vague sort of hunch that I read of a case something like this one, years ago, but I haven't the remotest idea where."

The business of an Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court is to determine whether, on the facts proved at the trial of any case, the judge has rightly interpreted and applied the law. Throughout the entire procedure there is one unalterable rule—their decision must be made exclusively upon the record as sent up from below. Nothing can be added to or subtracted from it. As the justly celebrated Professor James Bradley Thayer, of the Harvard Law School, used to say: "As we find it here, it is as it is, and whatever it is, this is it."

Judge Tompkins' decision in favor of the plaintiff in *Gamage versus Kellogg* was received throughout Somerset County with indignation. He must be a bum judge to let Squire Mason bamboozle him in any such fashion. Even poor well-meaning Mr. Lecky came in for a share of the universal odium. Justice! Baloney!

All the good burghers could do was to ostracize Judge Gamage and kick him out of the Order of Abyssinian Mysteries, and this they did with alacrity and enthusiasm. The judge, however, did not seem to mind any of it in the least, clearly content to remain placidly fanning himself upon the verandah of the Tarleton house, awaiting the confirmation of the judgment in the Appellate Division, to which Mr. Lecky had, as a matter of form, taken an appeal. What did he care if Squire Mason was the only person who would speak to him? What was the good opinion of a parcel of hicks like Toggery Bill Gookin, Cy Pennypacker, and Mose Higgins compared with fifty thousand smackers? He should worry!

But when he learned that Lawyer Ephraim Tutt had prolonged his vacation and was taking an incomprehensible interest in the case, he did begin to worry a little. Durn the old cuss! And had he known of a certain conversation between the old cuss and Ma Best, his own former landlady, he might have worried even more.

"How long has Judge Gamage adorned Pottsville?" Mr. Tutt had asked her meditatively, one evening after supper.

"About ten years. He lived here at the Phoenix House until he married Mrs. Tarleton."

"How long?"

"Almost four years."

"What was he a judge of, besides whisky?"

"Said he was a justice of the peace one time."

"Ever see any of his mail?"

"No. He had a private box at the post office."

"Didn't he ever mention where he had come from?"

"Nary a word."

Mr. Tutt coddled his long chin.

"When he left you—the time he married—did he take away all of his belongings?"

"Sure!" Ma pursed her lips meditatively. "I donno. Come to think of it, I believe he did leave some old duds behind. They didn't amount to nuthin', though. Seems to me, I put 'em in an old cracker box up in the attic. If I did, they're up there yet."

Twenty minutes later, Mr. Tutt and Ma Best, under the hanging kerosene lamp, were examining the duds on the dining room table—a soiled collar, a frayed pair of old suspenders, a broken comb, a rusty pocketknife, a tobacco tin, and an empty envelope addressed to "Hon. Thos. Gamage, Phoenix Hotel, Pottsville, N.Y.," faintly postmarked "Topsfield, Iowa."

That night Mr. Tutt sent a telegram to his legal handyman, Bonnie Doon, in care of Tutt & Tutt, Broadway, N.Y.

ASCERTAIN IDENTITY OF OLEAGINOUS EX-JUSTICE OF THE
PEACE KNOWN AS THOMAS GAMAGE WHO LEFT TOPSFIELD
IOWA SOME TEN YEARS AGO STOP THIS MAN MOUNTAIN WEIGHS
ABOUT THREE HUNDRED POUNDS HAS A FACE LIKE A TUB OF
BUTTER AND A SMILE THAT IS CHILDLIKE AND BLAND STOP
CHARGE EXPENSES TO ME PERSONALLY AND DO YOUR
STUFF

E TUTT

While Justice is proverbially blind, she is not necessarily either deaf or dumb. It is true that judges are not supposed to discuss the cases which come before them, but judges are human. There is a grapevine among the judiciary just as in most professions, and sometimes the grapes are sour. Mr. Tutt and his old friend, Tomp-

kins, fished Chasm Brook several times together that spring, and perhaps all their conversations did not relate to Brown Hackles, Silver Doctors, and Parmachenee Belles. Indeed, more than one letter passed between the two old men during the summer, pending the appeal, each containing cryptic references and esoteric symbols intelligible only to votaries of the law. And just as the maples were turning red and the air had a nip of autumn, Mr. Tutt was unexpectedly substituted as counsel for the defense for old Mr. Lecky, to the latter's great relief.

The New York Appellate Division for the Fourth Department, in which Pottsville is located, sits in Rochester, and "Gamage versus Kellogg" was among the appeals set for argument at the October term. Dorothy, who had secured a job as governess to two children belonging to the Hillsdale summer colony, had lost it with their departure for the city and had found nothing to take its place. Alan, though rapidly improving, was still in Arizona. She had been living on credit for more than a month, and the future looked more than dark. Nevertheless, she resolved that nothing should keep her from going to Rochester to hear Mr. Tutt argue her appeal, even if she had no chance to win and had to walk to get there. When the morning came, she was surprised to find how many of her fellow townsmen had experienced the same impulse. Indeed, it seemed as if, in addition to Ma Best, most of the Sacred Camels of King Menelik had boarded the train with her.

"You just keep your courage up, dearie," encouraged Ma as she squeezed in beside her. "If anybody can win your case for you, it'll be Mr. Tutt. He knows more than all the judges put together."

"I made up a limerick last night!" announced Toggery Bill Gookin proudly from across the aisle. "Listen, folks:

"There was an old fellow named Tutt,
Who at law surely knew what was what.
He'd twist any case
Into right-about-face,
And make the judge look like a nut!"

"Never knew you was a pote, Toggery!" exclaimed Sheriff Higgins, with genuine admiration. "But that's good, I'll say!"

"Why not make one about Gamage?" suggested Ma. "Let's try! 'There was an old buzzard named Gamage—'"

"Who always was up to some damage," supplemented Toggery.

"Can't finish it, though. Ain't no other rhyme for 'Gamage' except 'damage.' I've been through the hull durn alphybet."

"Never mind!" commented Mose. "Ma got the pint into the fust line."

Dorothy glanced about the great courtroom timidly. It was already three-quarters full, but since she wanted to hear everything Mr. Tutt had to say, she nerved herself to take one of the unoccupied front seats. On the other side of the room, Squire Mason was ostentatiously joking with her imperturbable stepfather. Inside the rail, the dignified clerk was arranging five little piles of pamphlets upon the dais before five empty chairs. If only the law were not so impersonal! Then she felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up to see Mr. Tutt's tall, ramshackly figure beside her.

"Can't you sit here with me?" she urged.

"I'd like to, my dear," he smiled down at her. "But I've got to get nearer the bench. Some of those old bozos are a little deaf."

"Have we any chance?"

He raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"Who knows? The law is always a gamble. No one can ever tell what judges will do."

Just then the clerk intoned: "Order in the court! Their Honors, the justices of the Appellate Division." Mr. Tutt hurried forward to the enclosure, and the five "old bozos" filed in and took their seats.

Really, thought Dorothy, in spite of herself, they seem like a very nice lot of old gentlemen.

The presiding judge, a whitehaired, rosy-cheeked, golfing-looking judge, arranged his robe, settled himself, and took up the calendar.

"Kellogg versus Gamage?" he called inquiringly.

"Ready!" answered Mr. Tutt and Squire Mason in unison.

The rest of the cases were marked either "ready" or "adjourned," and the presiding judge—familiarily known as the "P. J."—leaned back and directed Mr. Tutt to proceed.

"If Your Honor please," stated the old man, "this is an appeal from a judgment of the Supreme Court of Somersett County in favor of the plaintiff, Thomas Gamage, in an action brought for a declaratory judgment of forfeiture. Before I commence my argument, I respectfully ask permission to submit a supplementary brief. The fact is, I didn't have the good fortune to find the authority

upon which I chiefly rely until late yesterday."

The P. J. reached for the bundle of slim brochures tendered him by Mr. Tutt and distributed them among his fellow bozos.

"I think we can extend you this courtesy," he replied goodnaturedly. "Of course, you'll hand your opponent a copy and, if necessary, give him time to file an answer."

"Of course," bowed Mr. Tutt, proffering a similar leaflet to Squire Mason. "The case is here on stipulated facts. The testatrix, from whom title to the property in question derives, devised it to her only daughter, the appellant, on condition that the latter should not marry before she attained twenty-five years without the consent of her stepfather, the respondent, under penalty of forfeiting it to him."

The youngest old bozo, who had comparatively little white in his hair and sat at the extreme left, glanced up suddenly, as if in recollection. Then his eyes slowly traveled the courtroom and came to rest on Dorothy.

"The appellant did marry without her stepfather's consent and before that age," continued Mr. Tutt. "The question before this court is as to the effect of the clause limiting her freedom to do so."

"Are those all the stipulated facts?" inquired the chief bozo.

"Yes. It's a pure question of law."

"This court has repeatedly upheld the validity of conditions in trusts or wills restraining marriage on the part of the beneficiaries before a certain age without the consent of a third party," interrupted the P. J.

Mr. Tutt bowed.

"We do not rely upon the claim that the limitation is invalid," he remarked, almost casually.

Dorothy stiffened. But that was the only point in the case! What, in heaven's name, did he rely on, then?

The old lawyer cleared his throat.

"We rely solely upon the facts—" he glanced sideways at Mason, whose nose was securely buried in Mr. Tutt's supplemental brief—"which are, to say the least, unusual. Some ten years ago the respondent-plaintiff, Gamage, appeared in the town of Pottsville, took up his residence at the local hotel, and made himself popular with the inhabitants—especially the more well-to-do, among them Samuel Tarleton, the original owner of the property in litigation and father of the appellant. When Tarleton died, Gamage married his widow, a sickly woman, over whom he had acquired a strong

influence. During her last illness, she executed a will leaving her entire personal estate to her new husband, but devising the homestead, which had been in her husband's family for more than a century, to her only daughter—now Mrs. Kellogg—whom I have the honor to represent on this appeal.”

He waved toward Dorothy, and the five old bozos looked at her with interest and obvious approval. Mason was still reading feverishly.

“However,” went on Mr. Tutt, “through some mysterious influence, upon the nature of which we can only speculate, the testatrix was induced to add the clause limiting the girl’s power to marry. The will was signed on April ninth.

“On April eleventh, Dorothy, then nineteen years of age, brought her fiancé, Dr. Alan Kellogg, to her mother’s bedside, informed her of their engagement, and received her blessing. All this was known to the respondent. Nevertheless, the testatrix having died a few days later and the will having been probated, this man, Gamage, for the obvious purpose of acquiring the property for himself, refused to give his consent to the marriage.”

“I object!” roared Mason, coming suddenly to himself. “This is utterly improper! These alleged facts are entirely outside the record!”

“But are they true, counselor? I merely ask out of curiosity,” inquired the youngest old bozo.

Mason flushed.

“There is not a word of evidence in the record that any of them are true!” He glared at Mr. Tutt. “My opponent’s reference to them is outrageous.”

“Squire Mason is quite right,” answered Mr. Tutt patiently. “No, the facts to which I, unfortunately, referred are not in the record. I hope the court will overlook my transgression.”

“This court has got to decide this appeal solely upon the record and nothing else!” declared Mason with severity.

“Don’t excite yourself, counselor,” remarked the youngest bozo. “You may rest assured that the court will do as you so properly insist.”

“Go on, Mr. Tutt!” directed the P. J. “On the facts stipulated, how can you claim that your client has not forfeited the estate?”

Mr. Tutt paused dramatically.

“For the simple reason that under the law she has not done so. The plaintiff-respondent, Gamage, in the lower court failed to make

out any case whatsoever. The governing rule, as set forth in my supplemental brief, is to be found in Jarmon on Wills, Volume II, at page 853. It is to the effect that where a person would take an estate by inheritance, had there been no will, but does take it under a will containing a condition by which he may forfeit the property, he cannot be held to have incurred the forfeiture unless it be first shown that he was aware of the condition and broke it with full knowledge of what the consequences would be. The principle has been followed in Shackleford versus Hall, 19 Illinois 212; Merriam versus Wolcott, 61 Howard's Practice 377, and several other cases in this country as well as in England. I have found none to the contrary."

"I am not familiar with the doctrine you mention," commented the P. J. "It must have been rarely applied, but it is eminently just. So you claim that your client knew nothing about this condition in her mother's will?"

Mr. Tutt's face assumed a mask as inscrutable as that of Judge Gamage. He, too, could hold four aces.

"My claim, Your Honor, is that there is nothing in the record—that record so zealously guarded by Brother Mason—to so indicate."

Squire Mason leaped to his feet.

"Those aren't the facts at all! Dorothy Tarleton knew all about her mother's will. Judge Gamage warned her over and over again, that if she married Dr. Kellogg she'd forfeit her share in the estate. The will was probated and public property. Everybody in town had read it. She did the whole thing deliberately. She never pretended she didn't. Mr. Lecky always conceded she had."

"If Brother Mason," said Mr. Tutt quietly, "will show me a single word in the record to prove that Dorothy Tarleton had any notice whatever of the condition, I will consent to an affirmance of the judgment in his favor."

Each of the old bozos had reached for the printed record before him and was studying its pages.

"What Mr. Tutt claims is all nonsense!" declared Mason excitedly. "Read the note she left! 'This is to tell you that, although you are my guardian, I am going to marry Alan Kellogg without your consent, and in spite of what the consequences may be.' That proves she knew there would be unfavorable consequences!"

"There are always consequences to every step in life, counselor," returned the youngest bozo. "The sentence you have just read does not prove that the defendant knew she would forfeit anything under

her mother's will. *Non constat* that she wasn't referring to any one of the many well-known dangers following upon matrimony."

"But how about the next sentence?" demanded Mason. "Of course, I know that in refusing to approve my marriage, you are actuated only by the basest motives."

"Do you concede your client's motives to have been base?" inquired his tormentor.

"No, of course not! Merely that she claimed they were, because he'd get her property."

"Well, then, what were they?" persisted His Honor.

"Why—why, perhaps he didn't approve of her marryin' so young!" stammered the squire. "Or, mebbe, he thought the doctor couldn't support her properly."

"Perhaps! Maybe!" mused the justice, with a meaning look at the unhappy lawyer.

Mr. Tutt cleared his throat.

"In *Shackleford versus Hall*, Chief Justice Caton, while holding the marriage limitation legally proper in its terms; declared it to be ineffective, since there was no proof that the plaintiff had knowledge of it. To quote his exact words: 'One who has an estate or title real independent of the deed or instrument containing a condition of forfeiture, shall not be presumed to have notice of the condition, and he shall not be held to have incurred the forfeiture unless he committed the breach with knowledge of the condition and the consequences.' This court cannot, without proof, presume that my client had knowledge of the condition in her mother's will."

The P. J. nodded thoughtfully.

"There is certainly no proof of it in the record. If it ever were conceded—as to which I, naturally, can have no knowledge—whoever assented to this stipulation omitted that essential fact either inadvertently or through ignorance of the law. *Shackleford versus Hall*, and *Merriam versus Wolcott* seem directly in point. The doctrine, while unfamiliar—perhaps, even unique—is sound. In the absence of affirmative evidence to the contrary, we must presume that Mrs. Kellogg had no knowledge of the condition or the intent of her stepfather to claim a forfeiture if she broke it. . . . Have you anything further to say, Mr. Mason?"

It was clear that the squire had nothing to say, for he was teetering back and forth on the balls of his feet, his jaws agape, apparently on the verge of apoplexy.

The five old bozos put their heads together, conferred, nodded;

then each took up his pen, dipped it, and scribbled something across the cover of "Gamage versus Kellogg."

"The judgment of the court below is unanimously reversed," announced the P.J. "There is no need of an opinion. Judgment is hereby directed to be entered for the defendant. Call the next case."

Mr. Tutt turned from Dorothy Kellogg's joyous smile to the other side of the courtroom, where Judge Gamage had melted into a grotesque and deflated huddle.

"Your Honors," he said, addressing all five old bozos, but the youngest one in particular, "may I make an announcement that is strictly off the record?"

"You may," acquiesced the P. J., with a look at Mr. Tutt that was almost affectionate, for a judge.

"It is merely that, even if you had confirmed the respondent in his claim to the Tarleton homestead, he could not personally have enjoyed the occupancy of it. An officer with a warrant of extradition is waiting in the corridor to take him back to Iowa. 'Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein.'"

SOLUTION TO THE SEPTEMBER "UNSOLVED":

1. Control (con troll)
2. Congesting (con jesting)
3. Contribute (con tribute)
4. Consent (con scent)
5. Conceal (con seal)
6. Conduct (con ducked)
7. Confined (con fined)
8. Condescending (con descending)
9. Contraction (con traction)
10. Concave (con cave)
11. Conceding (con seeding or construing (con strewing)
12. Consensus (con census)
13. Contest (con test) or concourse (con course)
14. Conceited (con seated)
15. Conserving (con serving)
16. Contract (con tracked)
17. Contour (con tour)

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

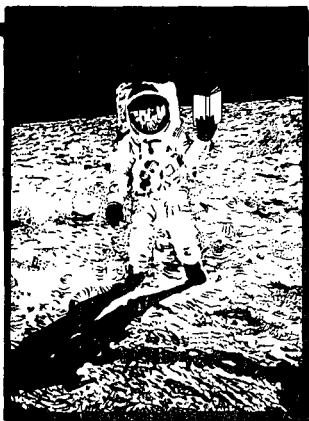


Illustration by Jim Galsen

The delightful Annie Laurance—proprietor of a wonderfully cosy mystery bookshop on Broward's Rock, South Carolina—is once again called on to set aside her paperback reading, and pick up her magnifying glass. In Carolyn G. Hart's **Something Wicked** (Bantam, \$3.50, 226 pp.), Annie is forced to move up from a supporting role in the community theater production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* to a starring one: darling Max has been arrested for the murder of one of the players, and Annie must draw on her expertise (having read and reread thousands of mystery novels) to save him from a determined D.A. The dapper Max, a staunch employee, a zany mother-in-law, a snooty store cat, and an irrepressible store customer—all the "regulars" are back to join in with the local cast of *Arsenic*. The result is antic fun, with generous portions of romance, menace, and mystery fiction name-dropping. *Something Wicked* is, in the timeless parlance of backstage lore, a "smash."

Sue Grafton's private eye, Kinsey Millhone, is really coming into her own now that the fourth in the series, "**D**" **Is for Deadbeat** (Bantam, \$3.95, 239 pp.), is in paperback and "**E**" **Is For Evidence** has been published in hardcover. If any of you are still strangers to this sassy Southern California gumshoe, I recommend to you "**D**" **Is for Deadbeat**. A client hires Kinsey to deliver a twenty-five

thousand dollar check to a teenager, which sounds too good to be true—and it is. The client, under his real name, turns out to be a newly-released jailbird who is also quite dead. And the teenager, whose parents and sister were killed by the dead man when he'd been driving drunk, doesn't want the money. Kinsey is independent and smart, with a droll sense of humor and a strong sense of self. But it is her sympathy for others, and her curiosity, that help her solve the case—a powerful, bittersweet success for her.

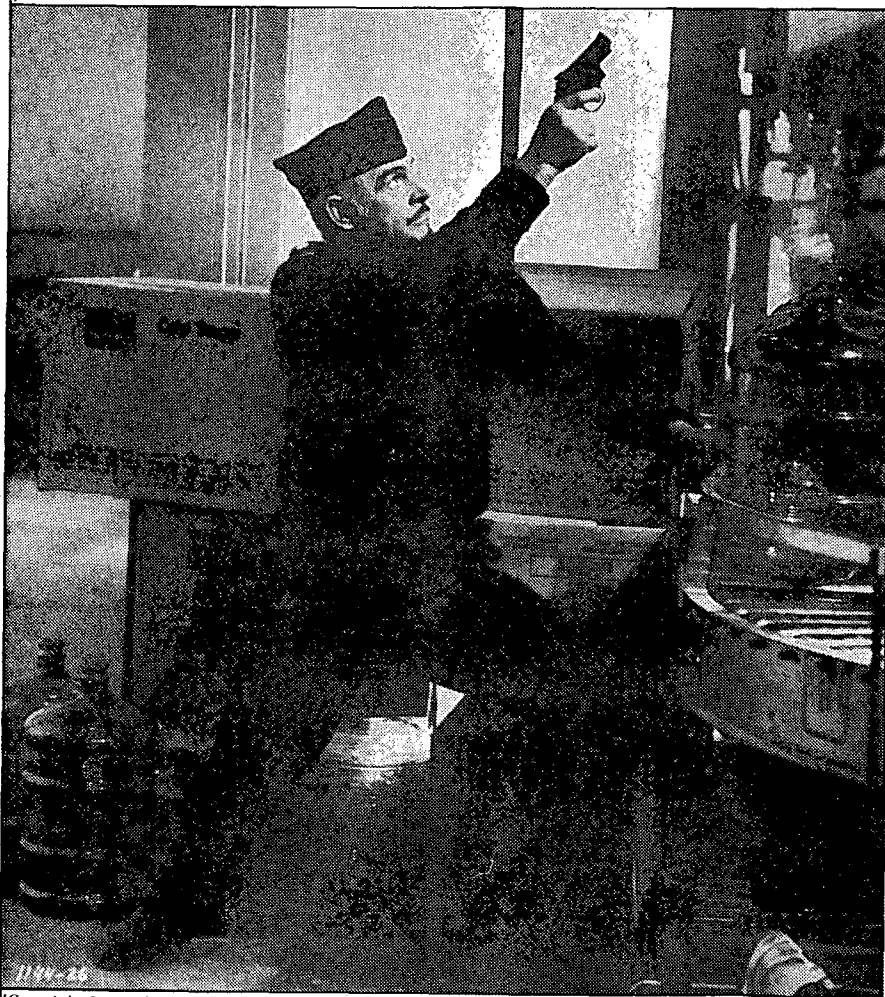
Ruth Rendell's **Heartstones** (Ballantine, \$3.50) is a novella-length (85 pp.) first-person tale with a heart-stopping finale. The work is a monologue by Elvira, a motherless teenager whose absorption with her father is definitely not healthy. As the tale unfolds, Elvira describes their days of quiet domesticity, Elvira and her bereaved father, and Spinny, her younger sister, always the third wheel, increasingly disturbed by apparitions. Then Luke, the girl's father, introduces his fiancée to them. Rendell has written a taut piece that has the feel of a whisper: it is softly sibilant, secretive, and carries as much foreboding as the brush of a cold breath on the back of one's neck.

Robert Campbell has launched yet another mystery series (this is in addition to the Flannery series, and the La-La Land books), and it's "All Aboard!" with Jake Hatch, hero of **Plugged Nickel**. Jake is a plainclothes detective working for the Burlington Northern Railroad out of Omaha. The novel opens with an abrupt, unscheduled stop of the California Zephyr on an isolated section of track in rural Nebraska. Someone has pulled the emergency brake, but not soon enough to save the poor traveler who's found lying alongside the tracks, cut in half by the train. The plot soon thickens when the M.E. in the next town declares that the severed halves originate from two different corpses. Jake narrates his own story, giving readers a guide who has never married and who has a close woman friend in every town along the route. Jake's smart, pretty laid-back, a sympathetic character who's a bit of a lone wolf and perfectly able to take care of himself. He's one likable character among a whole batch of fresh faces, but it's the railroad milieu that promises so much from this series. (Pocket Books, \$3.95, 219 pp.)

A fresh amateur detective and an interesting science/computer background add a lot to **The Physalia Incident** by Art Spikol (Viking, \$15.95, 291 pp.). Alex Black is the science editor and columnist for a weekly news magazine with a huge circulation. It's a good job for a man who likes to write, who knows a little about

a lot of things, and who finds researching via Stella (the firm's huge computer data bank program) both challenging and rewarding. Alex is not much for corporate politics, though, and he's no match for the boss, Colin Chase; so he agrees to visit Bermuda to privately investigate the bizarre death of a millionaire when Chase asks him. It is the man's widow who doubts her husband truly died of a jellyfish sting, and Alex can only guess what Chase's interest is in the widow. At any rate, he somewhat reluctantly goes to Bermuda, stands up to the local and disgruntled cop, and befriends a fellow traveler whom he later finds dead of a heart attack in his own room, working over Alex's own portable computer terminal. Alex keeps digging, even when Chase tries to call him off the scent, even when his own job back home is threatened by the stand-in editor's desire to settle in permanently.

Bonnie Indermill, office administrator and amateur sleuth from Carole Berry's *Letter of the Law*, was one of my all-time favorite detectives in 1987. So I picked up the sequel, **The Year of the Monkey** (St. Martin's, \$16.95, 246 pp.), with that combined feeling of highest hope and darkest dread so familiar to mystery readers (especially those of us addicted to series characters). I'm elated to report that *Year* is bigger, funnier, and better than Berry's first novel. Bonnie, single and in her mid thirties, accepts her new job with a few inner commandments and much firmness about a "career path" for herself. Fortunately, you can't keep a good woman down, even though Bonnie is still trying—when she's not sneak-reading a paperback—to climb the corporate ladder right up to the evening of the firm's Christmas bash when she danced a great deal with one of the firm's three owners. Someone partnered him a final time, however, and now the police think Bonnie looks good for the crime. Berry manages to find humor and a darn good murder plot among the interoffice memos, while-you-were-out slips, and telephone hold buttons which, after all, is the working milieu for most of us. Bonnie is an entirely fresh character, a woman with a keen sense of the ridiculous who's not a "professional" anything and who (much as she's fighting it in this second book) probably never will be a career woman. Berry has managed to make the mundane world of office work a marvelously inventive setting for a mystery series. Brava!

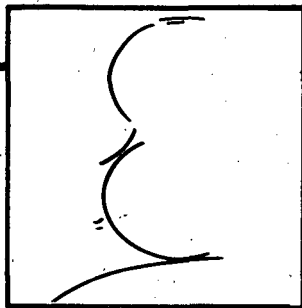


Copyright © 1988 by Paramount Pictures Corporation. Photo by Ralph Nelson, Jr.

Lieutenant Colonel Alan Caldwell (Sean Connery) aims his sights at the killers of a female M.P. under his command in *The Presidio*.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



One expects a mystery set in San Francisco, scene of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, to have as many twists and turns as the road leading up Telegraph Hill. Director Peter Hyams may have had this expectation in mind when he filmed **The Presidio**.

The Presidio is a military base at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge. The fourteen hundred acre compound, used by the American army since 1847, and its environs are the setting for this military mystery, a star-vehicle that plods as much as it twists.

The late-night murder of a female M.P. who stumbles across a break-in at the base's officers' club brings together an odd-couple of an investigating team: Provost Marshall Lieutenant Colonel Alan Caldwell (Sean Connery) and San Francisco police inspector Jay

Austin (Mark Harmon).

It seems that Austin once served as an M.P. under Caldwell, and they do not get along. When the audience is finally let in on why this is so, it turns out that Austin once arrested and punched a drunken officer for insulting his female M.P. partner. The officer was set free by—you guessed it—Caldwell. The female M.P. is the same one gunned down near the start of the story. And the formerly arrested officer stands out as our first suspect.

The two investigators still do not see eye to eye on how to handle the suspect, or on anything else. The brash young Austin is looking for another fight and a quick arrest when they pay a visit to the suspect's office. But the cooler head—Caldwell's—prevails for the time being.

The byplay between Caldwell

and Austin takes the spotlight off the murder investigation. However, screenwriter Larry Ferguson, whose previous credits include co-writing *Beverly Hills Cop II*, apparently felt the conflict between his two investigators was still not clear enough, so he provided a love interest for Austin, the lieutenant colonel's lovely young daughter Donna (Meg Ryan).

The affair between the young lovers aggravates the already tense partnership of the two leading men, but further puts off solving the case. Harmon (known mostly for his television work and as *People* magazine's Sexiest Man of the Year) and Ryan) in the remake of *D.O.A.*, reviewed in the July issue of *AHMM*, and a veteran of soaps) do make a handsome couple, though. The other major role, that of Sergeant Major (Ret.) Ross "Top" Maclure (Jack Warden), who saved Caldwell's life in Vietnam and is now his best buddy and confidant, also seems superfluous at first, but turns out to be an integral part of the story.

Predictably, Caldwell and Austin end up working pretty well together by complementing one another's styles. In an

intentionally funny scene, Austin manages to obtain the name and address of a suspect from an office secretary who's a "Dead Head" (a devoted follower of the rock band Grateful Dead), by speaking her language. Caldwell, on the other hand, can slip with ease through the military world, entering other military installations and getting information from the C.I.A.

Few films could escape from San Francisco without a chase, and this is not one of them. Early in the movie, the black-clad murderers jump into the getaway car and depart the scene of the crime into the foggy night and hilly streets of the city, the army and police in hot pursuit. This nighttime chase does not come close to the great daylight car chases in the San Francisco-set *Bullitt*. But a chase through the city's Chinatown, on foot, does better.

The mystery in the film does not unravel with the intricacies and thoughtfulness of a *Vertigo*, and even though Vietnam, the C.I.A., painted cars, and even bottled water come into play before the final credits roll, the solution, much like the soldiers stationed at the Presidio, seems a bit too orderly.

THE STORY THAT WON

The May Mysterious Photo-N. Merz of Bryan, Texas; Amy Luneburg of Hay Stites of Salina, Kansas; D. Indiana; Caroline Bessey of ans of Sherman Oaks, California; Mary Barclay of Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Sandra Davis Jeffries of Killeen, Texas; Debbie Brewer of Pompano Beach, Florida; Alfred W. Cross of Sacramento, California; S. J. Chezem of Canyon Country, California; Stephen Nicholson of East Harwich, Massachusetts; Angela T. Rea of Campobello, South Carolina; Linda Stanford of Richardson, Texas; and Katy Allen of Bellevue, Washington.



graph contest was won by J. Honorable mentions go, to Springs, Nebraska; Bradley S. Howard of Charlestown, Medford, Oregon; Jon K. Evans of Sherman Oaks, California; Mary Barclay of Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Sandra Davis Jeffries of Killeen, Texas; Debbie Brewer of Pompano Beach, Florida; Alfred W. Cross of Sacramento, California; S. J. Chezem of Canyon Country, California; Stephen Nicholson of East Harwich, Massachusetts; Angela T. Rea of Campobello, South Carolina; Linda Stanford of Richardson, Texas; and Katy Allen of Bellevue, Washington.

HORSE SENSE by J. N. Merz

"Now then, Ed, what's this all about? Why did you want to see me out here?"

"Last week I answered a 'fer sale' ad in the newspaper, but I got took, Chet, and didn't get the car what was promised. And you being a lawyer, I figured you could help me sue the crook thet took my money. Here's the ad. See what you think.

Ride in style. All-terrain vehicle with superior horsepower. Compact model, seats two. Similar to Mustang or Pinto. Low fuel consumption. Good mileage in city, even better on country roads. Cash on the line. Comes with alarm system guaranteed to discourage theft.

"So what's your problem?" Chet asked.

"See thet swayback nag and sorry dog. Thet's what I got fer my money."

"Sorry, Ed, but there's no law that's been broken. The horse lives up to the description in the ad, and after all, they never did say it was a car."

"Well, then, how about thet dog? Ken ya git my money back fer him?"

"He is an alarm system, isn't he? Doesn't he bark and warn you if anyone is around?"

"Sure did at first. Barked day and night till he lost his voice."

"Too bad, Ed. There's nothing I can do for you. I'm afraid you're saddled with a hoarse dog and a dog of a horse."

CLASSIFIED

MARKET

AH-OCTOBER/88

ALFRED HITCHCOCK—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word—payable in advance—(\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

AGENTS WANTED

WANTED: Managers For Party Plan Business. Profitable. Easy. Free Details. RMB, Box 883, Stevens Point, WI 54481.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SM, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it true . . . Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

SEIZED IN GOVERNMENT NARCOTICS RAIDS!! Automobiles . . . Vans . . . Boats . . . Furniture . . . Thousands of other items. Buy Dirt Cheap—Resell for Big Profits! Free information: 216-453-3000. Ext. A8270.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

AMATEUR Sleuths! Don't hesitate, Investigate. Subscribe to Amateur Sleuth Journal. \$5.50—8 issues. ASJ, Box 5318, Destin, FL 32541.

CONCERNED PARENTS, New PG PG-13 Video Movie Guide. Detailed Description of unsuitable contents in each movie. \$5.00 to: Movie Guide, Box A 20186, Chicago, IL 60620.

FREE List used mysteries hardbound and paperback. Mystery Mansion, 602 Sagamore St., Lakeland, FL 33803.

SUPERLEARNING! Triple learning speed through music! Develop Supermemory; Control stress; tap potentials. Free book excerpt & catalog (Distributors Wanted). Superlearning, 450-Z9 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY. 10123.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

BIG Mysteries Catalog! New, Pre-Owned, Hardcover, Paperback. \$10.00 Refundable with order. Mysteries, Box 8869, Ft. Worth, TX 76124.

VINTAGE Mysteries—Free Catalogue! Good, Inexpensive, Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-F, Cincinnati, Ohio 45232.

COMPLETE CITATIONS \$15.00 Listed Books by and about any author including pseudonyms. Further details write: BIBLIOGRAPHER, Box 2793, Kensington, MD 20895.

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

Free Detective Mystery Comic Book Catalogue, Retailer's Discounts. Renegade Press, 2705 East 7th Street, Long Beach, CA 90804.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Niche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

FREE CATALOG! Used hardback mystery, detective, and true crime. Wallace Pratt, 1801 Gough St., San Francisco, CA 94109.

FREE Brochures offering HUNDREDS of "How To." Self Improvement Books. CDSA Enterprises, Box 4265, St. Joseph, Missouri 64504-4265.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-MDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

FREE! ALL NEW home based MONEYMAKING opportunities! Send sase: Burandt Enterprises, 6901 Lilac, P.O. Box 529, Battlefield, MO 65619.

PLACE

CLASSIFIED

AH-OCTOBER/88

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY: Get "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

THE LAZY way to WEALTH. Free Details—Wilson Investments Inc., 114 Chaussee Blvd., Summerville, SC 29483.

\$2000 monthly Home-Mailing Program! Guaranteed earnings. Start Immediately. Free Details: Impact Press, Box 3205-B, Rock Island, IL 61204.

VENDING MACHINES. No selling. Routes earn amazing profits. 32-Page Catalogue FREE. Parkway Corporation, 1930NO Greenspring Drive, Timonium, Maryland 21093.

GET PAID for reading books! Write: Pase-XM9, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

MAKE MONEY By The Minute Around The Clock For Doing 4 Hours A Week Paperwork From Home. Grows To A Lifetime Income. Free Report. Surico, Dept. 8910, 135 E. 9th St., Long Beach, CA 90808.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts. . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49424.

AUTHENTIC NAVAJO SANDPAINTINGS oak framed with traditional medicine figures, 6x6 \$18.50, 8x8 \$26.50, 10x10 \$34.50. Send check or money order. Isleta Indian Arts, Box 1805, Bernalillo, N.M. 87004.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

FINANCIAL

DEBTS Pressing? We'll help now. Bad credit no problem. Licensed/Bonded. Applications to \$20,000. Not a loan company. Free application call 1-602-995-9777 or write: Allied Acceptance, Dept IO, 3003 West Northern #1, Phoenix, Arizona 85051.

LOANS available for small business! Call federal Loan Information (800) 824-6461 for immediate details!

FOR INVENTORS

INVENTORS! Can you patent and profit from your idea? Call AMERICAN INVENTORS CORPORATION for free information. Over a decade of service. 1-800-228-5656. In Massachusetts or Canada call (413) 568-3753.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

INVENTIONS WANTED

INVENTORS! HAVE AN IDEA, don't know what to do? Call AIM for free information toll free in U.S. and Canada: 1-800-225-5800.

JEWELRY

SOLID GOLD JEWELRY MANUFACTURER DISTRIBUTORSHIP AVAILABLE. INFORMATION CASSETTE SEND \$1: GF, BOX 1016 HIGH RIDGE, MO 63049.

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-910 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

Classified Continued

AH-OCTOBER/88

LOANS BY MAIL

LOANS! FAST! CONFIDENTIAL! FINANCIAL, 1480-F Terrellmill, Suite 290, Marietta, GA 30067.

MONEY PROBLEMS? Write us. Immediate Loans and Outright Grants to individuals refused elsewhere. 98% eligible! Associates, Box 350098-D2, Brooklyn, NY 11235.

MAILING LISTS

NEW NAMES MONTHLY! MIXED STATES AVAILABLE! IMMEDIATE SHIPMENT! Adhesive Labels; Computerized—Guaranteed Opportunity Seekers 200/\$15; 500/\$25; 1000/\$40. Others. Advn. Drawer B3, Shelley, ID 83274. Visa/MC/AmEx. 1-800-992-3866.

EAGER Mailorder Buyers. Opportunity Seekers names on adhesive labels. 100/\$2.75; 300/\$6.50; 500/\$9.50; 1000/\$13.50; 2000/\$25.00. Guaranteed. Modeverbest, Box 1089-T, Doylestown, PA 18901-0089.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly? Send six 25¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

EARN EXTRA MONEY. Start your own business. Sell high fashion costume jewelry rings. For information and special gift offer, contact: R&C Creations, 119 Rockland Center, Nanuet, NY 10954. (914) 623-5722.

FREE INFORMATION. Earn hundreds per week in your spare time. SASE to: FAMCO, INC., Box 5924-D, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6C 4E8.

HOME mailing program. \$1,250 weekly possible. Start immediately! Free Details: Butler Enterprise, Box 3357, Chicago, IL 60654.

FORTUNE AT HOME! Simple plan. Cash in mail. Free plan send SASE: J&L Sales, 102 Jefferson, Salamanca, NY 14779.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

MAKE THOUSANDS at Home Guaranteed. Send \$5.00 to: Wilson, P.O.B. 212, Chriesman, Texas 77838.

MAKE \$5000 a Month with Garage Sales. Send \$3.00 For Complete Instructions. Can-Am Publications, P.O. Box 132510, Chatham, Ont. N7M 5R9.

SELL YOUR PRODUCT on TV. Free air time for right product. Test Marketing. Call George 602/833-8111.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

WE buy Newspaper Clippings of Wedding Announcements for \$1.00 Each. Instructions \$2.00. Clippings, Box 491A2, Gatesville, Texas 76528.

ADVERTISE Free in 507 magazines and newspapers. Directory \$5.00. Directory, Box 11R, Atlanta, Georgia 30301.

\$200—\$500 weekly—AT Home!! No gimmicks—Details FREE!! Homeworkers-V, Box 636679, Margate, FL 33063.

"FLEA MARKET PROFITS": FREE Report includes Ideas, Tips, Merchandise Sources. O'Donnell's, 9-IN Sewanois, Lincoln Park, N.J. 07035.

BECOME FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT! Nothing To Buy, Stock or Sell! No Large Fees! Clemens Enterprises, D, 3528 Esplanador, Irving, TX 75062.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

AH-OCTOBER/88

PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American — Mexican — Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Lat-ins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage: Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton, #1580, Denver, Colorado 80202.

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. VIDEOS AVAILABLE. PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 811230084.

CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone/Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-TM, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

INTERNATIONAL PEN FRIENDS—Exchange letters. USA and foreign, your choice. Patricia Smith, 2061 Perry Terrace, Stuart, Florida 34997.

NICE SINGLES, ladies and men, with Christian values. Free details. Send age, interests. Dept. IO, Box 454, Crossville, TN 38557.

PRINTING, Mimeo & MULTIGRAPHING

PRINT Booklets 3c. Print 1000 8½×11, \$15.12. Booklet Planning-Pricer Free Speedy-books, 23860-7V Miles, Cleveland, Ohio 44128.

SALESMEN-DISTRIBUTORS

RENAULT Advertising Specialties. Top Com-missions Bonus Incentives. Service All Areas. P.O. Box 535, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971.

CHRISTIAN SALESMEN! ENJOY \$1,500-\$2,200 WEEKLY! Market exciting proven patented product for supermarkets. Protected area, company training, outstanding support, rapid nationwide growth. FOR FREE OPPORTUNITY FOLDER call or write: Pat Darrell, Guardschek 1, 1702-S. Hwy. 121, Suite 402, Lewisville, (Dallas) TX. 75067. (214) 436-4468. MEMBER: FELLOWSHIP OF COMPANIES FOR CHRIST.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

MAKE BIG PROFITS! Sell over 2500 fast-selling low price items, at swap meets, retail stores, parties, etc. \$3.00 brings giant catalog—refundable with your first order. OAKDALE WORLD PRODUCTS, 9901 Wild Oak Ct., Dept. IO588, Oakdale, CA 95361.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES JUST \$1

**A \$190.40 VALUE IN ORIGINAL
PUBLISHERS' EDITIONS**

That's right! We'd like you to enjoy \$190.40 worth of great new mystery and suspense stories, as your introduction to The Detective Book Club ... *for over 45 years, the unsurpassed value leader in mystery fiction.*

All 12 intriguing novels will be delivered to you in 4 specially-designed, easy-to-read triple-volumes, available exclusively from The Detective Book Club for *only \$1 plus shipping.*



Top Quality Selections at Unbeatable Prices

As a member you'll forget daily cares as you solve baffling murder cases, suspenseful whodunits, tense courtroom conflicts and more, all featuring the challenging plots and gripping action that are the hallmarks of today's most-read mystery masters like Dick Francis, Elizabeth Peters, Tony Hillerman plus many others ... chosen for Club members by our expert editors from among the more-than-400 mysteries published each year.

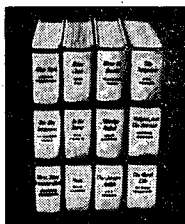
Best of all, each monthly Club selection (described in advance) is offered to you at *unequalled savings*. As a member, you're guaranteed 60% ... and often 70%, 80% or more ... off the original publishers' prices. Each selection includes three newly-published novels in one handsome hardbound triple-volume edition for *only \$11.95. That's just \$3.99 per full-length mystery!*

No Risk, No Obligation

When you become a member of The Detective Book Club, there is *no minimum* number of books you must buy. You may reject any book *before or after* you receive it. You may cancel your membership at any time, with no obligation. It's that simple.

Send No Money Now

Simply fill out the coupon on this page and return it to The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576. You'll enjoy a *10 day free trial* to examine the evidence and judge for yourself. *But act now!* If you love great mysteries, it would be a crime not to accept this offer.



Yes, please enroll me as a member and send me my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for 10 days, then will either accept all 4 volumes for only \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's Preview describing my next selections. I will always have at least 30 days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 30 days and owe nothing. For each triple-volume I keep, I will send you just \$11.95 plus shipping. I understand there are no minimum number of books I must buy and I may cancel my membership at any time.

88-EE
D26M1Z

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.



THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576

Since 1942, the best way to get more mystery for your money.

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A TERRIFYING NEW MASTERWORK BY

FREDERIK POHL

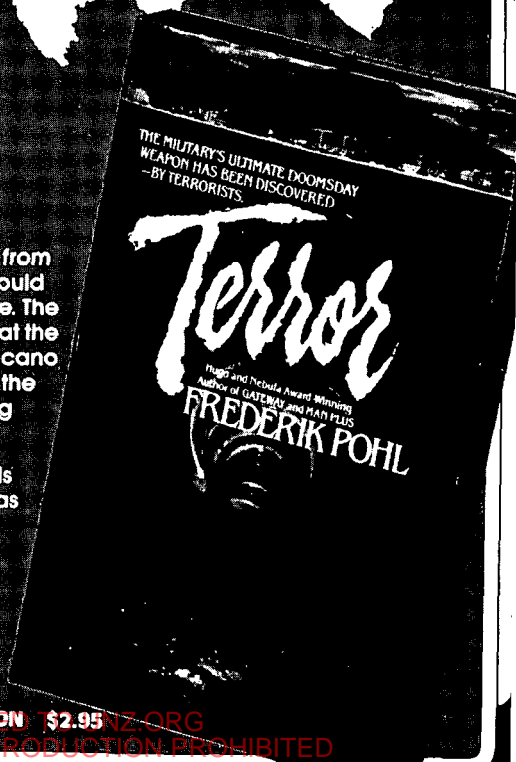
Terror

Clouded in secrecy and protected from land, sea, and air, Project Vulcan would tap the life-energy of the Earth's core. The doomsday bomb carefully placed at the weakest edge of an underwater volcano off the Hawaiian coast would cover the Earth in a dust cloud that would bring food production to a grinding halt.

Now Vulcan has fallen into the hands of terrorists. And the world watches as they grip the detonator—and make their demands.

"A daring writer...Pohl has always been willing to try something new in his fiction."

—A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction



BERKLEY SCIENCE FICTION \$2.95

NZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MYSTERIES JUST \$1

A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE
Jeffrey Ashford

JUGGERNAUT BAGLEY

THE MIND OF MR. MOSLEY

Weeks THE CAPE MURDERS

TONY HILLERMAN

SKINWALKERS

St. Peter's
Finger

GLADYS MITCHELL

DICK
FRANCIS

BOLT

TROJAN GOLD

ELIZABETH PETERS

MURDER ON A MYSTERY TOUR

Marian Babson

THE DEAD ROOM

HERBERT RESNICOV

CHARLES
GARDNER

THE BEST CELLAR

AZRAEL

William L. McGarvey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED